



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
St 362o
v. 3

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

13

OUR LITTLE GIPSY.



OUR LITTLE GIPSY

A Novel

BY

EMMA C. C. STEINMAN

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD HOUSE AT ALDING."

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

SAMUEL TINSLEY & CO.

31 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

1881.

[All Rights reserved.]



OUR LITTLE GIPSY.

CHAPTER LIX.

SHALL this my story ever venture out of the old oak chest wherein as it proceeds I deposit it? If so, and if I should have a young girl for a reader, she will not be surprised to learn that our Helene lay awake through the whole of the night succeeding her evening encounter with young Daubigny. She arose, indeed, next morning, how different from the Helene she had been only the afternoon of the previous day! Her heart had been wounded anew, reflection had depressed her naturally lively spirits. During the night's long hours of wakefulness, she had recalled, she had gone over and over again, all that had passed in that startling interview. She had gathered enough to determine that St. Amour was a traitor, and she must believe also that he was a traitor in Tresham's pay. Would the wily valet, without recompence, without hope of profit, have cared to betray her little secret? It was evident, too, that he made reports of her conduct, her movements. From whom but from St. Amour could Tresham have heard

of Lord Brailsford's meeting her that Sunday in church ? In fear and in anguish the young girl had recalled not only young Daubigny's words, but his looks. She sees again his long-shaped deep blue eyes, their whites all tinged with bloodshot, the unrestrained and eager gaze that he had fixed upon her, and memory tells her that his manner had a freedom, a confidence in it that she feels to be positively humiliating. That bold and eager gaze pursues the girl, she almost shudders at the recollection. She could only find some palliation for his conduct in the belief that he had been drinking. She knew that at a distance of ten miles from Brierly there was a racecourse. She had seen in the county paper that something just now had been coming off there, and she tried to hope that the sinner's confident manner, his eager, disrespectful gaze, his crazy jealousy, had arisen from the wretched habit in which he indulged. 'Ah, yes,' muses the hapless girl, 'he must have been drinking with the men he met with at these races. He might have sat up playing at whist or écarté all the night before ; he might have snatched, as it were, but a hasty morning's doze, then up to commence anew. His brain must surely have been bewildered.'

How poor was this consolation, yet it was a consolation. She could bear anything from him rather than deliberate licence—disrespect. How saddening was the thought that by her own inadvertent folly she had furnished St. Amour with the possibility of misrepresenting her !

From Sir Charles our little Gipsy had managed to conceal her mind's uneasiness, and the untoward cir-

cumstance whence that uneasiness arose; but lying awake all night, and thinking so cruelly, had given her a fluttering heart and a pale cheek.

The trifling disarrangement and inconvenience arising from their approaching departure, their intended lengthy sojourn at Hastings, was all in Helene's favour. Saint as nature had formed him, yet Charles Daubigny's mind this morning must be a little disturbed. He has to collect various letters and papers that possibly he may require while absent from Brierly; he has to lock up others which may be left where they are; and, besides, the post brings him two long letters, and these he reads while they are at breakfast. Her husband's thoughts thus diverted, the little wife's unusual paleness for the present escapes his notice.

And here, though I may have done so before, I must again remind the young girl my supposed reader, that the world she lives in is not precisely the same world wherein the Helene of our story lived. In Helene's girlhood, railways were rather novelties than otherwise. England was only partially intersected by iron rails, and many people still persisted in the old mode of travelling. They preferred safety and privacy to speed, noise, and publicity. They would sooner travel at a slower rate in their own vehicles, than have the nuisance of taking tickets at a crowded railway station, and then (oh! greater nuisance still), perhaps have to step into a railway carriage where might be sitting the last person they desired to meet.

Charles Daubigny had always been rather a shy man, and we know that he was sensitive to the last

degree. Hence he shunned, evaded railway travelling whensoever he could. Moreover, he was deeply enamoured of Old England. He loved a quaint old English inn, and could put up with its antiquated ways. He delighted in a dusty highroad, bleached by the summer sun, running, as a highroad usually did in those days, between blithe green hedges fragrant with wild honeysuckle. He loved the time-worn route no less, when o' one side 'twas bounded by forest-land or by the wild free common, gay with furze and heather, on the other perhaps by a venerable park paling grey with lichen, or green with streaks of tiny ivy. So we find to-day he travels in an open carriage, in a britzska, a carriage now as much out of fashion as the four post-horses and the blue-jacketed wizen boys who bestrode two of the four poor doomed animals. Doomed, alas! they were, to feel the spur day by day till they could feel no longer. And who thought of them? I am afraid not even Charles Daubigny as he speeds onwards with his little wife beside him.

Our travellers have not gone more than half one stage of their journey, when the sky suddenly becomes overcast. A few large drops of rain fall from a dark and threatening cloud, and the weather lately having been so warm, Sir Charles is apprehensive of a thunder shower. He therefore orders the carriage to stop, and desires the two grooms in attendance to get down and put up the britzska's leathern hood. Scarce a minute and the men are down, the hood is up, and Helene, thus sheltered, and weary to the last degree from her last night's sleeplessness, lies back in mourn-

ful silence, forgetful for the first time since her encounter with young Daubigny in the coppice that she has to act a part.

Helene was not naturally given to be silent, neither was it her custom to lie languidly back in a carriage. Her husband, too, had expected that the idea of the sea and travelling, both of which she delighted in, would have given a new impetus to her spirits.

"Are you well, my dear child?" presently he says, and the little wife finds our poor master gazing anxiously upon her. "You look pale, Helene."

The girl's cheek flushes now with rosy colour. Consciousness of her own reserve or simulation causes a glow of shame. But she perseveres in her acting. "I have a headache," she answers. "Perhaps because you think there will be thunder. Oh!" she continues, "now that you have had the hood put up, no one will see me, I may take off my bonnet and rest my head on your shoulder. May I? Will you let me?" Poor unsuspecting Saint, he not only offers his shoulder, but so disposes an arm around her that she may rest more at ease, and Helene, thus cosseted, nestles down against her husband, much as a child would nestle against its nurse.

Quietly enough the carriage speeds over the next mile of road, but in that quiet mile our little Gipsy contrives unwarily to fall asleep. She can act no longer. She is apt to talk in her sleep, and presently Sir Charles is aghast. He hears her in an excited tone pronounce the name of his nephew. Nay, he hears more, a second time she speaks. "Tresham," she

exclaims, "let me pass on, I insist, this instant." The start that our master gives at this inadvertent blunder awakes the girl. She opens her eyes; she sees her husband gazing upon her, his dark brows ominously knitted, an expression of dread is printed on his wan and *spirituel* countenance.

"What is the matter?" asks the little dreamer, raising her head and scarce knowing where she is.

"What have you been dreaming?" inquired Sir Charles, his dark eyes full of impassioned sorrow.

At these words an uncontrollable sigh broke from the girl's manacled heart. She tried to smile, however. "Have I been talking in my sleep?" she inquires, "for I have been quite sound asleep."

"Yes, child, you have been asleep, and in your sleep you spoke distinctly, excitedly. You spoke of my nephew. You appeared to be speaking to him. You bade him let you pass instantly."

"Well, I did dream that I met him, and it seemed to me that he had been drinking too much, and he would not let me pass."

"That is a state in which you are but too likely to meet him, if, indeed, you should ever be so unfortunate as to have another encounter. I hear, or rather information has reached me from several quarters lately, that occasionally, for a whole week together, day after day, he will be scarcely himself."

"Tresham has many kind friends, it seems, amongst your correspondents. Tell me who amongst them is the greatest slanderer; who is it seeks most to widen the gulf betwixt you?"

"That privilege may possibly be reserved for yourself, Helene. When I hear my nephew's name murmured in your sleep, when I hear such exclamation as followed, must not suspicion awaken? Unhappily, I know but too well his unscrupulous nature. Would he not blast my happiness, would he not ruin you if he could?"

"And is it possible that you can attach so much importance to a mere dream?" asks Helene.

"Do we not ordinarily dream of that that is most present to us in our waking hours?"

"Come," cries the girl, affecting a playfulness she did not feel, "come, I will not have my journey spoiled by such a lecture. My headache is better, but how shall I cure you of these fantasies of the brain?"

"By curing yourself of these vagaries of the heart, my love. I had hoped that they were extinct."

"Is there any wisdom," asks Helene, "in making a mountain of a molehill? Will it be any satisfaction to you to hear me say it? Listen then. I solemnly assure you I desire never to meet Tresham more. See, there," continues the Gipsy, "there is a milestone, one mile from Reigate. That is the place we change horses at. I must put my bonnet on and set myself in order, ready. You told me yesterday that Reigate is a great busy town. You are kind now, aren't you, dear?" pursues the girl, putting her arms around her still pouting Saint, and pressing her rosy lips against his forehead. Then taking a little ivory workbox in her hands, and opening it, she sets it up on the seat opposite to her, kneels down like a very child on the carriage mat, and arranges her hair, puts on her bonnet by the looking-glass in the lid of the box.

CHAPTER LX.

THE happy or the wearisome idleness that characterises sea-side life disposes people so circumstanced to take an interest in trifles. A new family arriving at the next-door house, a new set of people on the Parade, an equipage of pretension unseen before driving up and down the approved route by the sea, furnishes food for remark. Hence, when our britzska, with its four steaming post-horses and its two blue-jacketed boys, draws up before the house in Breeds Place, two young people and a portly dame of middle age are peeping from the balcony of next door, to see alight from it those whom destiny had decreed should be erewhile their neighbours.

Sir Charles, tired with travelling, stooping a little, looking very delicate, steps out of the carriage first, then waits until his little Gipsy, clasping Pug, descends.

It is a very windy day, and a windy day at the sea-side disarranges everything. Helene's bonnet, of very light open-work straw, just as she emerges from the britzska's hood, is so unceremoniously assailed by rude Boreas, that to keep it from flying back she must needs put her hand to its brim, while in the other hand, as

we have already mentioned, or rather under the arm of the other hand, she has Pug.

St. Amour stands on one side the carriage step offering his services. Hannah, Hannah, who had been in the dickey with the valet, and who had been holding *her* bonnet on for miles, Hannah descended from her elevation, but holding her bonnet on still, nevertheless, and also offers to take Pug. But the little wife, agile as a fawn, bounds gracefully down the carriage-steps on to the door-step, and enters the house intact. And it was not only the girl's bonnet that had been disarranged by the gale, her dress, her muslin-dress had received as rude a greeting.

One of the young people watching from the next door balcony, a youth of the ruder sex, watching the arrival, cries out to the other young person by him, who is of the softer sex, "What a display! why, the little gal ought to pay the god of the winds something handsome for giving her such an introduction to a fellow. Bravo! excellent!"

"Geoff," cries the young female peeper in a whisper, "pray don't talk so loud; you'll be overheard. Pray have a care. I am almost certain, that is, I really believe—"

"What?" asks Geoff, interrupting his companion, "because I seem—"

"What do you seem?" cries the other. "Have you an idea that you ever saw her before?"

"It strikes me yes, somewhere."

"The girl who went with Sel and me to the play," suggests Geoff's companion.

"Ah, how strange ! and what a nuisance if it is !"

"Why?" asks Geoff's sister.

"Why? Because I should have liked to have been her next-door neighbour, and I'm off first thing to-morrow."

But Sir Charles and his lady, Hannah, the valet even, has disappeared. The carriage with its four weary posters is on the move, and Geoff and his sister forsake the balcony for the drawing-room. The middle-aged and portly dame (an invalid) had been driven within-doors before by the unruly state of the weather.

"Aunt," cries Geoff as he sets his foot in the drawing-room, "who's taken the house next door?" But aunt is seized with a fit of coughing and cannot answer, and Geoff's sister, first sympathising with aunt, presently informs her brother that they did hear that Sir Charles and Lady Daubigny had taken it; that they were a newly-married couple.

"He that little gal's husband?" cries Geoff. "Ha, ha! that poor little delicate shred of a man. Just imagine such a thing!"

But while Geoff is expressing his amusement, the drawing-room door opens and a man-servant announces that "dinner is ready." Geoff is quite ready for it. His sister also has an appetite; nay, even aunt, though supposed to be consumptive, can eat, and in the interest of dining, for the time, the next-door people are laid aside.

And presently Helene and Sir Charles sit down to dinner also, and after dinner our poor master seems completely knocked up by his journey, so much so that the little wife, though she is longing to run down

on the beach just for a minute with Pug, longing to be buffeted by the fresh sea-breeze, longing to look at the great rolling crested waves, dare not. No, she feels that she must not leave her husband, lest the suspicions of the morning be reawakened in his mind. She is very dutiful, very tender, represses her childlike inclination for the beach, gives Pug to St. Amour for a run, and patiently sits by Sir Charles whilst he reclines on the sofa. He has a little nap, and she cannot help thinking as she gazes on his *spirituel* and interesting countenance how angry, how astounded she should be were *he* in his sleep to murmur forth the name of some woman whom she had reason to suspect he loved better than herself. "Were it even the name of poor mamma," muses our little Gipsy, "I believe I should be angry." So when he wakes she is kind without effort, and she makes his tea so well, and she tells him how much she likes the house (though in truth she scarce had seen it), and he goes to bed reassured and rests in peace, and the little wife, thoroughly tired, sleeps the sweet healthy sleep of girlhood, and wakes in the morning fresh and lovely as an opening rosebud.

Our master loves to hear her pretty voice as she runs to take a peep out of her bedroom window next morning ere she is dressed, reporting that "the wind has gone, the sea is calm, the day will be lovely."

Extract from a letter which arrived at the house in Breeds Place next door to that taken by Sir Charles, three mornings after our master and the little wife had become temporary residents at Hastings :—

"We were *not* wrong, we had seen the pretty little brown gal next door somewhere before. I asked Selina if she knew who it was Sir Charles Daubigny had lately married. 'Oh, don't you know? Why, the very dubious young person I chaperoned to the play,' answers Sel with a meaning smile. Then cried I, 'Carry and I for once in our lives were right,' we had seen Lady Daubigny before. I then related to her how we witnessed the arrival, how I was struck as well as our aunt by the extraordinary difference in age.

"Presently Holroyd joins in the conversation; he explains who she was, and who was the fellow that so unceremoniously walked in to us at the play. Our wide-awake brother-in-law finishes up by begging me, by *requesting* his wife to be extremely cautious.

"'You must try to get over your little prejudice,' says the sly old fox to Sel; 'Sir Charles Daubigny is the best client I have. Moreover, he is as worthy a man as ever lived, and I feel quite confident had there been the slightest flaw in Miss Graham's character he never would have married her.'

"'I do not mean to say anything,' answers Selina, 'but my impression, my belief can never be altered; it must remain the same. That there was some secret intelligence between Sir Charles Daubigny's nephew and that young person I chaperoned to the play I never can doubt. Geoff, didn't you see it all as well as I? Aren't you a witness that I did not only imagine?'

"'I can only say,' answered I, 'that I would have given something to have been that night in that fellow's shoes. The heaving bosom, the blushing cheek—'

“‘That’ll do, Geoff,’ cries out our prudish Sel.

“‘Now, Carry, listen and attend : what says brother Geoff is this. You’ve got nothing else to do. You watch the pretty little gal next door, look out and see how your neighbour comports herself, and if there’s any mischief in the wind write and let me into the secret. By Jove, I think I could be tempted to put up with the obscurity, the twilight even, of Breeds Place with a prospect before me of doing a little business in the way of flirtation *there*.’”

The fast young girl who reads my story—alas ! where is there a slow one to be found in these days of rapidity?—the fast young girl, I say, who reads my story will not have forgotten Carry, the lively Carry, nor the scene at the play between the hapless Helene and young Daubigny.

How strangely truth pursues us ! Here at Hastings Helene might well have supposed that she could live unobserved, and that nothing would be known concerning her past history. And here, next door to her, is one who witnessed that scene at the play, and one who has a pair of idle eyes bidden to watch her in the future.

The portly dame we have described as looking from the balcony on the arrival of our travellers is Lady St. Donats. She has been ordered by her physician to Hastings for the autumn and winter months. Her lungs and her throat are in a bad state. Quiet, perfect quiet and great care, the doctor says are essential : dissipation, late hours, low dresses, must be altogether discarded. Lady St. Donats, then, is doomed to retirement. She has two daughters ; they are, however, both

married, and married advantageously. Each has a wealthy husband, a good establishment, and each alike loves the world as mamma has taught them to love it. They would hate to be shut up in Breeds Place all the autumn and winter, so they apply to their cousin Mrs. Holroyd to know whether a sister of hers will undertake the office of companion to their sick mother. Full well they know what a weary life these sisters lead at the Welsh rectory. And Mrs. Holroyd after a little delay writes back that Carry will be glad to come. Then Mrs. Holroyd writes to the giddy Carry, and warns her that she will have to lay aside her thoughtlessness, and Carry returns for answer that she will be quite like an old maid, that she will remember everything and be very attentive.

Brother Geoff, from whose letter we have made an extract, is very fond of getting leave. He has been stationed near a certain refractory town in Ireland. The dragoon regiment to which he pertains had been called upon more than once to intimidate the potato-eaters. He is glad to get a few weeks' leave, glad to leave the bludgeons, the long tail-coats behind him.

And now he is in England again, he is as busy as a bee, as merry as a cricket, staying first with one rich cousin then with another. One of these fair and well-married cousins had been making use of the idle Geoff, had been despatching him to his father's Welsh rectory to bring thence the lively Carry. On his return journey he had deposited Carry for one night at Mrs. Holroyd's, next morning had run down with his sister to Hastings.

In her inmost soul Helene could never perfectly reconcile herself to the fact that Charles Daubigny was her lover. Long had nature absolutely recoiled from him in this novel character. But when our master had fallen ill at Brierly, her tenderness had been so wrought upon, so quickened, so augmented, that she had resolved, if ever again the opportunity offered, her conduct should be such as to give him perfect satisfaction.

We have seen how playfully, how rapidly she had put to flight a part of the resolution which during his illness he had formed,—a resolution springing from bitter disappointment.

Perhaps if he had never come to such a resolution, if he had never as it were acted upon it, he had never conquered.

But he had left her, he had taken to his bachelor apartment, and now the girl, with all the fickleness peculiar to her sex, would fain win him back. But to win him wholly back was no easy matter. His soul had been too deeply wounded, his natural distrust of his own attractiveness had been rekindled ; moreover, the jealous fears our little Gipsy had awakened in her husband's mind could not easily be laid to rest.

However, no better judge, no keener spy, no subtler spirit than Monsieur St. Amour, and we give a portion of a letter despatched by him to Tresham Daubigny from Breeds Place :—

“ Sir Charle n'est plus l'hermit, reclus. Mi Ladi et mon maître sont devenu des amans véritables. Il n'y a pas lieu d'en douter. C'est une chose accompli. A quelle heure, en quelle mode fut accompli ce réunion-là

je l'ignore entièrement. Mais évidemment toute va bien ; ils vivent ensemble en parfaite intelligence. Mon maître est passionné amoureux et *mi Ladi* sub-mits doucement.

“Pardon, mon tres-honoré jeune maître. Pardon my liberty. Mais je vous entends dire. ‘Tout ceci n’augure rien de bon.’ Souvenez-vous que ce qui est différé n’est pas perdu. Les flammes de l’amour ne brûleront pas pour long temps. Les jeunes même elles s’épuisent—les vieux et les foibles elles s’apportent plus rapidement à la mort. Je vous conjure soumettez vous à la raison. Ne devriez vous compter pour quelque chose en votre faveur ces flammes amoureuse ? Je lui en donnerai un seul, un petit an, et puis.”

LETTER FROM CARRY TO HER BROTHER GEOFF.

MY DEAREST GEOFF,—What could be more provoking? Never a bit of mischief have I been able to report to you till I expect it is too late. Your leave, I feel certain, must expire in a day or two. I wanted you so much just to enliven me, and could not with all my watching detect a single flaw in *mi Ladi*. She seemed to have assumed with her title the correctness of a prude. However, as you will presently discover, this prudery is all on the surface, merely put on ; for absolutely turns up another young fellar with whom she has had what Sel calls “private intelligence.” I’ll tell you how it was.

I was sitting in the drawing-room looking drearily out of the window, when I noticed a slim-made, plain-faced, but delicate and rather *distingué*-looking person-

age walking very slowly past the house. I noticed that he turned back and looked up at the Daubignys' windows. Again he lounged by, still eyeing their house, and suddenly I heard her Ladyship's voice. She must just at this moment have skipped with her Pug in her arms into the balcony. I saw her, I heard her exclaim, "Lord Brailsford!" The lackadaisical loungeur hereupon came to a stand-still. Lifting his hat and gazing upwards he answers, "You are surprised perhaps at seeing me. But I had a fancy just now for a little sea air. I am at the Victoria Hotel, St. Leonards."

"Have you been there any time?" inquired our neighbour.

"No, only a day. May I call upon you?"

"Sir Charles, I am sure, will be most happy to renew his acquaintance; he will be very happy to see you."

"What does your answer imply? Is it only Sir Charles who will welcome me?"

"O no; I shall be very glad too. Will you come up to me now?"

"Yes. Shall I knock or ring, or what?"

"The hall door is always left ajar, push it open. Come in, no one will interrupt you. If any of the servants are there they know you, or will, if you give your name."

The pale, affected-looking, boy-like creature immediately acted on her Ladyship's suggestion. It seemed but an instant ere he was beside her in the balcony, your tendering such a soft but impressive greeting.

"One thing," cries she, "I must say you are a poet,

and all poets are absent and dreamy. Will you not forget yourself, and speak before my husband of the piece of folly I perpetrated? Do you remember my injunctions? all that I said about it that Sunday at Brierly? Perhaps you have forgotten?"

"Forgotten, Lady Daubigny!" he murmured, "forgotten! no, indeed. I believe that every word you spoke to me on that Sunday is present; nay, every word that you ever spoke to me is graven on my memory. Can you imagine me insensible? Words that fall from lips so perfect, the voice that utters them so musical!"

"That will do," answers the pretended prude, "that will do; if you value my friendship, if we are to be good neighbours, never flatter me."

"Neighbours!" retorted the young Lord, "neighbours! You seem determined, Lady Daubigny, that we shall not be neighbours. Have you not flown from Brierly?"

"Ah! oui, à présent. Mais le futur. Ne vendra pas le futur? Do you think Sir Charles will always be away from Brierly?"

"What is the future?" murmurs the lackadaisical creature, "what but a mist, a cloud! To-day, the present, is the only time we are sure of. When, Lady Daubigny, do you think of returning home?"

"Oh, I really do not exactly know. I have been doing my utmost to persuade Sir Charles to take this house for another month. Nay, I believe he has agreed."

"You are very amiable certainly. Do you not know?"

But how should you remember anything in relation to such an insignificant person as myself? Of course you forget my very existence."

These words were spoken in a tone of offended dignity. There was an exceeding *hauteur* in the manner of the speaker.

"Indeed I do not," answers her Ladyship; "it gives me great pleasure to see you."

"Can I believe this when you choose to be away from Brierly precisely at a time when common civility to our family would have induced you to be there?"

"Je suis tout en nuage. How have I offended?"

"Oh! I will not intrude my affairs. Will you be so good as to tell Sir Charles that I called?"

"Surely you are not going without seeing Sir Charles?"

"Yes."

"No, but you must not indeed. I forbid it," cries the girl playfully. "Now tell me what it is that vexes you, and if I can I will remedy my fault. Whatever I have done has been inadvertent."

"Inadvertent, certainly. What can my birthday signify to your Ladyship?"

"Your jour de fête? I never knew on what day it falls."

"Has not Sir Charles, has no one ever mentioned to you that on the 14th of next month I shall be twenty-one?"

"No, indeed."

"According to the custom of the world," pursued the evidently offended lordling, "according to the custom

of the world there should, on the occasion, be some manifestation at my father's house and on his estate, some, shall I call it affectation of rejoicing? My mother wants to have a fancy ball. She asked if I would heartily participate in it. I demurred. Lady Daubigny, may I inquire if such a thing as a fancy ball has any interest for you?"

"Interest for me! Am I desired as a guest? Does your mother intend asking me?"

"Of course my mother will ask. The question is, will you say yes? Will you be there?"

"Oh, do you know I should delight in it? But how could I manage to leave this place just when I have been persuading Sir Charles to stay for the sake of his health? How could I persuade him to return to Brierly merely for my own selfish gratification?"

"But is it impossible that you should visit Brierly for a week and return hither afterwards?"

"I really dare not myself make such a proposition, he would think me so selfish, so frivolous. When he comes in you make the request. Oh! how delighted I should be! I have never even seen a large ball."

"Am I to believe this? Surely you dance? Nature unaided cannot have given such perfect grace."

"Please let us dispense with compliments. I did not mean to say that I do not understand dancing. I have been well educated in dancing from my baby days. But you know, or perhaps you do not know, that since I have been grown up I have lived in the wilds. You who know the world, do you not find me rustic, bizarre, a little zingaree?"

"You whom nature has so exquisitely endowed, do you not find me a very strange fellow? My mother is constantly telling me of my eccentricity."

"Then I shall feel more at home with you. Perhaps we are something alike. I am so glad."

"Glad that I am silent when I ought to speak; glad that when I do speak, I do not say the proper thing; glad that I cannot tell polite lies."

"Yes; if you had been a creature perfectly fitted for the world, I should have had a fear, a shrinking, a dread of your sarcasm."

"Impossible, Lady Daubigny."

"I tell you I speak the very truth. But see, here comes Sir Charles! I can see him on the beach. Remember, if you give him the slightest hint of the folly I perpetrated on my wedding day, he will never let me come to the ball. How I ever came to do it I cannot imagine. But I was angry on my wedding day. I felt like a wild colt of the forest tied up in a stall; like a robin of the woods caught and caged."

"Ha!" exclaimed the listening lordling, "ha! you felt mischievous."

His manner of speaking was full of playful satisfaction.

Sir Charles was now crossing the road, and whatever might have followed was lost to me, for the innocent prude and bird the second that she has snared, nay, including poor Sir Charles bird the third, together left the balcony and entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LXI.

“Do you think it would be wicked to have a new dress for this ball?”

When Helene murmured forth this question, she was in a state of sweet and childlike repose. She half reclined upon a sofa, her husband’s arm supported her, and her rounded cheek rested on his bosom.

It was evening, the evening of an October day, and in that twilight house darkness had fallen early. The Breeds Place drawing-room was lit up plenteously with waxen lights, a fire burned on the hearth. There could be no picture drawn of greater domestic peace and comfort.

As the girl murmured forth her question, she slightly raised her head that she might consult the countenance of her mentor.

“How could I think it wicked, my dear child?”

“Just so soon after papa has given me so many and such lovely dresses, that is why. But this ball is a peculiar one. People may come in fancy dresses, and I have a fancy to look just like a girl on my Watteau fan.”

“I hope, my dear child, that the figure has a perfectly discreet, unobjectionable dress. Remember, it

will be your first appearance at the Bedingfields'. I should not like to see you in a dress too remarkable."

"It is not remarkable at all except for its prettiness. I will fetch the fan after dinner and show you."

"You possess one dress which, with a little modification, could not be more becoming."

"That gold-coloured one you scolded me for wearing?"

"That very dress. It fitted you perfectly; it suited you. It cannot have been spoiled with an hour or two's use."

"Oh! it is quite new; but I am scarcely satisfied with it for a ball. Is it not too heavy?"

"Of that I am of course no judge; the only objection I saw to it was its audacious lowness in the body, but some muslin or some lace added—"

"Well, of course, but I think I should like to have the other dress, mentioning to Madame Celeste that it is for a ball, and then I could go in which I liked."

"You have another dress, Helene; that which you wore on your wedding morning."

"I should not like to go in that," said the girl. "It would seem ridiculous, as if I wished to parade myself in the character of a bride. No, if it is not wicked I will have a dress *something* like that I love so on my fan. But how can I get my fan up to Madame's place? If I sent it by the coach it might get hurt or lost. I would not have my dear, darling fan hurt or lost for the world."

Sir Charles had given this bijou of a fan. He was pleased to find that the girl so valued it. "St. Amour

shall go up with it," he answers, "if you are so very desirous of this dress."

"I say if it is not wicked," pathetically pleads the girl, for her voice betrays the urgency of her desire.

"My dear child, I believe it is the first thing that you have asked for since our marriage."

"I have no idea of asking for things I do not really require."

"I am very glad, very thankful to find you have this good disposition. Some foolish girls, circumstanced as you are, Helene, had coveted, nay, had acquired by this time a hundred expensive trifles. We have been living very quietly, very modestly here. I have been surprised at Eliza's moderate weekly expenditure, and I have in my mind a little scheme of charity on which to bestow my savings. I shall consider it as a little memorial of the happiness you, my child, have permitted me to realise. Helene," added Sir Charles with deep, sweet tenderness in his voice, "Helene, these few last weeks have been the happiest in my life's experience."

The girl, on hearing of her husband's satisfaction, strangely enough only answered by a sigh. Yet she nestled more closely down, and he thought her at rest; he thought her, perhaps, happy as himself. But, alas! his words had awakened for a moment the slumbering serpent that lurked, ever lurked; she felt its sting.

The memory of Tresham came athwart her young heart. The knowledge of her own duplicity, the remembrance of the weary work it had been to her to

simulate a passion she could not feel, almost caused the tears that dimmed her eyes to gush forth as nature bade them.

But she was thankful, nevertheless, thankful to find that a being she loved with such sincerity had found the happiness he coveted.

It will be seen from the foregoing conversation we have recorded, that Charles Daubigny had listened favourably to Lord Brailsford's request. He had, in fact, accepted the invitation, but not without conditions. He told his young neighbour that he could not bring his wife to the ball unless Lady Bedingfield had previously called upon her, and that there should be no obstacle to such an arrangement, Lady Daubigny and himself would return to Brierly a few days earlier than that of the birthday entertainment. The young Lord answered that he quite comprehended, and thoroughly entered into Sir Charles's feeling; that on his return home, which would be at the end of the week, or perhaps before, he would speak to his mother, and he could answer for her readiness; and he was sure she would honour Sir Charles the more for his scrupulous delicacy of feeling.

We have only further to state, that even before Lord Brailsford returned home he could give the required assurance. On quitting Breeds Place he had immediately written to his mother; he had said that he was satisfied she should give the ball on his birthday, and how *accidentally* he had run against their neighbours the Daubignys, and that it depended on herself whether they would be present. To make a call on

the new-married lady previously Sir Charles felt would be the proper thing, nay, indispensable. To this statement Lady Bedingfield had replied most graciously. She sent a message through her son to the baronet, which quite allayed his sensitiveness.

Lady Bedingfield, although approaching forty, was lively, almost young-looking, and full of vivacity,—a vivacity tinged by mischief. As she had promised, she came to call on her new neighbour, and surprised Helene by her ease of manner, her condescension, her instantaneous familiarity. Before she left Brierly she had expressed a desire to know if the girl intended assuming a character on the night of the ball, and what sort of dress she would appear in. At length she volunteered to go up-stairs and inspect the two dresses between which Helene herself was so divided. Lady Bedingfield brought the matter to a decision infinitely amusing and gratifying to our naughty little Gipsy.

“My dear,” she said (for already Helene was ‘my dear’), “my dear, you shall appear in each of these dresses.”

“But Sir Charles a little disapproves of the Watteau dress.”

“Oh! we can manage so dexterously that my excellent neighbour will know nothing about it. My brother the Dean is a friend of your husband’s. They both play whist. There will be a room set apart for cards. I will settle them down nicely, and come and give you a hint that now is your time.”

"But how could I change my dress, even if it were right?"

"Oh, my dear, your maid and your dress must both be awaiting you in a little dressing-room I can easily spare."

"But ought I to do this?" asked the girl; "and can I?"

"You ought and you can. A thousand pities the Watteau dress should never be seen, and a little black mask perhaps, and no one will guess you are yourself."

"But if I do this," murmurs Helene, "some one must take care of me, and some one must escort me back into the room. I am a coward, une novice."

"Oh, my dear, you need have no apprehension. I will myself re-introduce you to the ball-room, and my son will have the greatest pleasure in waiting on your Ladyship."

As Lady Bedingfield uttered the last few words she looked full of animation and mischief. "I assure you," she continued, "you are the first of the female creation who has ever possessed any charm for my son. Do not discourage him, my dear, by any affectation of prudish nonsense. He is far too noble-minded to bring any scandal upon you."

"O yes," answered Helene, blushing, "I never thought it possible. If I may presume to say so, I have a friendship for Lord Brailsford. Is it presumptuous when he is so clever?"

Lady Bedingfield gazed on the girl with a scrutinising gaze; the result of her scrutiny was that she did believe

that the girl's friendship for her son was of an innocent character. She had taken a fancy to Helene.

The Countess, an acute observer, had discovered her son's tenderness for the girl, and whatever conduced to his happiness must be interesting to herself. She knew his reserved, his fastidious, his sensitive nature too well to show to him that she had discovered his infatuation; but, unscrupulous herself, she inwardly resolved that if possible he should unhindered indulge this his first passion.

Lady Bedingfield had a peculiar reason for sympathising with her son. In her own girlhood she had been compelled or induced to subdue, to suppress her first, her virgin passion, thereby blasting the life, the happiness of the man she really loved. She had given her hand to Lord Bedingfield when another possessed her affections, and with all her levity she could feel sincerely for her Stephen's present misfortune.

Few need be the sentences in which we record the inner life of Lucy, Lady Bedingfield, but our story requires such a key, otherwise it would seem involved in mystery.

Lucy was one of a large family. Her parents, of lofty lineage, but in straitened circumstances, led but a life of sorrow and unceasing mortification. They were obliged to appear to be what they were not,—to be mean or careful when their generous natures would have prompted them to be generous or even lavish. Lucy, through the whole of her childhood, had had a sad experience of poverty and pride. But with all this experience she fell in love at sixteen with a cousin as

well descended and as poor as herself. Desmond de St. Brie was at college; he was destined for the Church. Neither Lucy nor her lover dared breathe a word of their mutual passion. They agreed to keep their engagement a profound secret. But by the girl's carelessness in mislaying a letter her entanglement was discovered. She was peremptorily forbidden to hold any further communication with her cousin Desmond, and finally, when brighter prospects seemed dawning upon her, she was commanded or persuaded into writing to him and abjuring her engagement.

Not many months after this, young as she was, she became the bride of Lord Bedingfield, at the time of her marriage John Everard Leigh, heir-presumptive to the title.

In taking this step, in listening to persuasion, Lucy had not only brought a lifelong sorrow upon herself, but she had, as it were, scathed and blasted the nature of another. Desmond de St. Brie, determining never to marry, and with a bias towards the Romish Church, quitted the University, and presently took orders as a Romish priest. As a Protestant vicar or rector, in process of time married to his Lucy, he had probably remained through life an undistinguished man; but without his Lucy, ambition his only guide, by the time we introduce Lady Bedingfield to our reader's notice, her *ci-devant* lover had become a rising star under Papal rule.

Lucy had loved her cousin Desmond with intensity. She loved him through all her married life. So graven was his image on her soul, that Stephen, her first-born

child, showed tokens of her hidden passion. He resembled the priest in many ways. The strange green eyes that under excitement seemed to become darker, almost dark, the same features, the same delicate hands ; but the priest was a man more robust in form, with an ease of manner, a fluency of speech which Stephen did not possess.

It was not until Lady Bedingfield had passed the first bloom of her loveliness that the Earl her husband became aware of his wife's early and secret attachment. Having observed that on several occasions her rustic-looking little Lord paid particular attention to a woman as artful as she was attractive, Lucy, who had been accustomed to be the sole object of his devotion, in a fit of jealous rage launched her unwelcome secret upon him. So utterly unconscious had he been, that at first he would not believe, and thought his playful wife had but invented the story to provoke him. Then Lucy, forgetful of her long-maintained reserve, laughing him to scorn, betrayed so much of the past as to make *him* jealous. Lord Bedingfield, in fact, became not a little suspicious ; and when Lucy's fit of anger had subsided she heartily repented having allowed her little man to gain a knowledge that proved so inimical to her peace.

Up to this period, having been left in happy ignorance, the Earl had never objected to the priest's occasional visits at his house, and had been utterly careless of his Lucy's receiving from time to time a letter from the pious recluse. Henceforward he greeted Lucy's cousin in so distant a manner, that, alarmed at the change, St. Brie had retired to Italy, and finally settled down in France.

CHAPTER LXII.

It is indeed November, but it is one of November's fairest days. There is a peculiar stillness, softness in the balmy air; the sun shines with a subdued, a sort of hallowed splendour, its sad rays lending a deep, a mournful beauty to the autumn-tinted scene on which they rest.

How exquisite to the lover of nature is the richly-coloured but fast-fleeting foliage of the giant trees that stand in groups about the park, nor less to be delighted in the dying fern-leaves stretching far and far away in distance. And sauntering dreamily amid this scene of venerable beauty, where nature owes its sweet perfection to the care of man, is Stephen Leigh, Lord Brailsford. But to-day the youthful poet heeds not nature's glory. He takes no note of this old park, this goodly portion of his future heritage. The house that stands so prominently out before him he seems not even to see, though 'tis a mansion any man might well be proud to call his home. Custom has made that low-built, rambling, picturesque old pile too familiar for it ever to strike him as a mark of beauty in the landscape. Ah! now all inadvertently he stands beside the placid

lake. Its waters lie in perfect glassy stillness. The tall bulrushes on its margin scarce retain their verdant summer hue, and for the maple and the beech that almost mingle with the rushes, the leaves of one are scarlet bright, the other withered brown. The weeping birch, the mountain ash, whose pliant branches sweep the tide, they are but in their bare and shadowy grace, their fallen leaves float on the surface of the stilly lake. 'Tis only here and there a drooping stem shows vivid green, only where fondly clings around the deep-hued hardier ivy. And Stephen Leigh stands gazing on this scene of nature's most entrancing loveliness. But to him to-day it is but vacant space. His heart is heavy laden with his first, his sinful passion. He knows that it is wrong, but that he heeds not. He must love her, only her, and he has decided in his wild romance to be another Petrarch, dreaming of, devoted only to our little Laura. The girl has married a man old enough to be her father, and the sanguine Stephen flatters himself that though his Laura may give her affection, her attentions, her lawful obedience to Sir Charles, yet, possibly, had she been free to choose, he himself had been the husband of her choice. It is all too late. Sir Charles, though often ailing, will certainly live on. Invalids live the longest. And he shall live on too, and die unmarried. Yes, he shall live on, cherishing the wound the innocent girl so inadvertently has dealt him. He will press the barbed arrow deeper into his heart, but no human eye must mark his suffering.

Such is the wild dream of the youthful and im-

passioned poet, but born romantic and unworldly, Stephen will do no battle with imagination.

All that just now oppresses him is the dread that he may betray his secret. He feels indeed that to keep it through years to come will be a task of no easy nature. But he must exercise a constant vigilance. He knows that Sir Charles has the most delicate perception of what is right; he knows that his soul is endued with an excess of sensibility, that if he had the slightest suspicion his door would be closed against his treacherous young neighbour.

And Lord Brailsford feels that he must exercise a like vigilance with his own people, more, perhaps, for the girl's sake than for his own.

He wanders on. His mind is equally oppressed with anxiety as with hope. He looks forward to the evening of the morrow, the evening of his birthday, the evening of the ball, with sensations various and we fear somewhat unhallowed. He shall see the girl appear as a guest in his father's house. How beautiful will she be in her *parure*! His heart beats quicker as imagination paints the sun-ripe vision. He has always said that he hates dancing; but to dance with her, to have one opportunity of circling her rounded waist! If but that she might touch him, lean against him, it were ecstasy, it were bliss!

There could have been no two more striking pictures of superlative vanity than might have been sketched on the evening of the birthnight ball.

Lady Bedingfield repairing or adding new lustre to

her now rather *passée* beauty, then dressing with so much care and anxiety in her private apartment at the abbey.

The Countess and her French maid spared no pains, and they succeeded *à merveille*. Lucy looked absolutely lovely. But here was a picture in which art mingled with nature. The second picture is one purely natural—a picture of Helene in the great nuptial chamber at Brierly attiring herself for the momentous occasion. Ah, reader! wilt thou try to behold the good, grave Hannah, that most formal of old maids, attiring our little Laura for Petrarch's birthnight ball? The girl stands before the dressing-table gazing on her own sun-ripe beauty as it appears depicted in the toilet mirror before her.

Says Hannah, "The bodice I fear is a little tight, Madam."

"Well," answers the girl, "I think I have grown rather fatter lately."

Hereupon the old maid, unseen by her mistress, turns away to hide a smile, then proceeds to finish lacing up the yellow satin bodice.

"How long it takes you, Hannah!" says Lady Daubigny.

"Well, my Lady, it is very difficult to make the whalebones at the back meet."

"You *must* pull it to, I can't go without. What a nuisance that I am getting so fat!"

"There, it is all right now," says Hannah.

"It feels very tight," cries Helene, shaking her shoulders uneasily, for she was quite unused to undue

pressure. "Does the dress look nice?" continues the girl, addressing Hannah.

"Oh! it's beautiful, Madam. That that the dress-maker's done has made it perfect."

And here we should mention that there had been quite an active correspondence going on between the renowned *modiste* Madame Celeste and our little Gipsy.

On hearing that the golden-coloured dress was to be worn *perhaps* on the night of the ball, Madame had expressed her *horreur*, and had requested to have it sent up immediately, that at least she might lighten it. On its arrival Helene had received another communication. Madame could not find resolution in her heart to destroy one of her *chefs-d'œuvre*, she had therefore decided on making a new satin skirt for the occasion, draped over with a tissue of the airiest kind, and looped up by *guirlandes* in a manner suited to a fancy ball.

Hence now the dress the girl had on retained nothing of the original one save the bodice. The petticoat or skirt matched that in colour, and was indeed draped *à merveille* by the airiest gauze, caught up in festoons by lifelike bouquets of honeysuckle and pink roses. The dress, as Hannah had declared, was perfect; nor had the injunction Sir Charles had given been forgotten. The audaciously low bodice was *modified* by the required folds of gauze, a sort of fiction, serving but to enhance the charm of the girl's natural beauty.

As Helene joined her husband to enter the carriage, St. Amour, who was waiting in the hall, placed with the daintiest care a fur-lined mantle over his lady. No

one could have put it on so well, it was effected without disparagement to a fold or a flower, and the valet would take it off as carefully in the great hall at Otteley Abbey.

Poor Sir Charles! how unconscious he was as they drove along of the mischief Lady Bedingfield had designed, and his little Gipsy was so ready to perpetrate! Helene had received a note from the Countess that morning, written on delicately-tinted paper, a note telling of the musk-scented cabinet or escritoire where the rose-tinted paper had lain. It was also sealed with a perfumed white waxen seal bearing the lady's coronet and the word "Lucy." In it she reminded the girl of their conversation, reminded her that she must arrange to bring or send her maid with the Watteau dress, described how her own maid would be on the look-out in the hall ready to conduct the Brierly damsel to the little dressing-room at the end of a certain long gallery, a dressing-room to be set apart specially for Helene's use, and she concluded her note by naming the precise minute at which she hoped her neighbours would arrive.

And Sir Charles and the little wife did arrive at the prescribed moment. Our poor master had had quietly at home his beloved cup of tea, so they declined entering the refreshment-room, and were ushered straight up-stairs.

Dancing had not yet commenced, but a crowd of people, some in fancy, some in more rational costumes, some in dominoes and masks, had already assembled, and at every minute others were arriving.

Lady Bedingfield stood at the door of the ball-room ; Lord Bedingfield was not far distant. The Countess greeted each new comer, or each fresh group of her visitants, as they passed her, then left them to follow their own pleasure and devices. But with Helene the case was different. She knew that this was her first appearance in the gay world, and she entered the ball-room with the girl ; nay, she did more, she walked across it to where her own daughter Lady Georgina stood, and introduced Helene to her. Georgina had never so much as caught a glimpse of our little Gipsy before, but she had thought of her nevertheless a great deal. She had never forgotten "the promised token ;" she remembered the remarkable initials prefixed to the writing, and she could not but remark, however much *he* might strive to conceal his feelings, she could not but remark the interest her brother took in the Daubignys. Stringing one circumstance to another, she believed that she now saw before her the very person whose name her brother would not reveal. Accordingly at first she gave to Lady Daubigny but a distant bow. A glance of disapprobation from her mother induced her next moment to extend her hand. Yes, she did shake hands with the presumed culprit, but this was all.

Next moment, as though no Lady Daubigny existed, she resumed her flirtation with Sir Ruthyn Pell, a young Irish baronet in the same regiment with Carry's brother Geoff.

Lady Bedingfield was a little annoyed by her daughter's coldness of manner to their new neighbour, and to

efface the ill impression it might create, she herself moved on some paces further with her intended *protégée*. Lord Brailsford, dreading lest he might betray a tithe of the passion he felt for the girl, had been only gazing in the distance.

How did his foolish heart flutter when his mother beckoned him to come nearer! What silent ecstasy when mamma playfully demanded if he were sufficiently awake to dance the forthcoming quadrille with Lady Daubigny! Before Helene had appeared in the ball-room, on being solicited by the master of the ceremonies, Stephen, in his absence of mind, had announced "that he did not dance." Heedless, however, of his own so lately made declaration, Stephen now takes his place with Helene on his arm ready for the forthcoming quadrille. Despite all effort at self-control, the lips, the eyes of the master of the ceremonies testify his amusement at this sudden change of mood in the hero of the night; and many a fair girl is also scrutinising Lord Brailsford and the partner with whom he has chosen to open the ball.

Brought thus prominently forward, Helene is criticised by the younger swells lounging about no less than by their sisters, but in a very different spirit. The girls, envious of the distinction the young Lord has conferred upon Helene, can see no fascination in Lady Daubigny. The men, on the contrary, can see a great deal. They ask of each other how and where Sir Charles has picked up so *piquante* a morsel? Who was she? How is it she dances with so perfect a grace?

One pompous and aristocratic old parson who has

daughters to dispose of, at the instigation of his inquisitive and silly wife, ventures to make some inquiries of Lord Bedingfield respecting the young wife of his nearest neighbour.

I think I have mentioned before that our rustic Earl had never moved on with the fashion, that of a morning he wore top-boots and kerseymere breeches. His evening attire (that he appears in now) is also of the same date that he had worn in his youth,—black silk knee-breeches, stockings to match, shoes with small buckles, a blue coat, a white waistcoat, a vast cambric shirt-frill lying across his bosom, a roll of white muslin cravat round his throat, so voluminous, so arranged that his little fat dimpled chin is half-buried in it.

Whether he vouchsafed to say more in answer to the pompous old parson his neighbour we know not. Some of his words might possibly have been lost in the folds of his cravat, but all that actually reached the Reverend Sir Mounteney Skeffington was as follows: “Another time—explain—Graham—Lady Daubigny’s father—man claiming a Scotch peerage—see it yourself, you will, Sir Mounteney, presently—evidence—before the House.”

The Reverend Sir Mounteney manages ere long to thread his way through the glittering crowd, and places himself before the sofa on which his inquisitive and expectant wife is sitting. He gives her the scanty tidings he has gathered. “Graham,” she repeats in a half-whisper, as Sir Mounteney contrives to bend his usually erect and soaring head a little that he may the better catch his lady’s words, “Graham, and claiming a

title, too. O dear! some beggarly Scotchman, no doubt, who has palmed himself off on poor Sir Charles as a person of family and pretension."

In her own peculiar playful manner, Lady Bedingfield had given out that her entertainment was to be a fancy ball and birthnight revel. Masks and dominoes were to be allowed, fancy dresses without masks, plain dresses and no disguise for those who preferred it. Ah! we seem to see it even now. That birthnight ball presented to the idler looking on at once a gay, a glittering, a picturesque, an impressive scene. We use the word impressive in reference to the character of the building in which the glittering crowd was assembled.

Otteley Abbey, as its name imports, before the Reformation had been a religious house, and the dance to-night comes off in an apartment long held sacred, then as long neglected, till it had become almost ruinous. A wealthy and eccentric Lord Bedingfield, some sixty years before, had reopened, had endeavoured to restore, had left it in its present state of splendour. For what purpose this noble apartment originally had been designed, to what use in monastic times it had been put, cannot now be traced. Antiquaries have differed strangely. Leaving them at their leisure to discuss, to determine, we continue our story. We need only say that vast was the room in length, lofty in proportion, with a ceiling highly decorated and forming a series of pointed arches. At night, ere the holy brotherhood had been expelled, the room had been lighted by octagon-shaped lanterns suspended by chains, a lantern to each

pointed arch. From these now fell upon the moving crowd below a soft, a hallowed light. But on such an occasion a more brilliant light was required, and, in order to supply this, gilded branches had at intervals been affixed to the walls, charged with tall waxen tapers.

A ball and a birthnight revel our audacious Countess had christened her party. Surely this imported other entertainment besides mere dancing. And in truth there were going on during the evening diversions of various kinds, but only one of these we shall particularise. The Lady Georgina, though destiny had decreed she could not be the hero of the night, determined not on such an occasion to be overlooked. She would make manifest her talent and her taste. Georgina had naturally a fine voice, an excellent ear for music; she had given much time and study to both vocal and instrumental harmony. But besides possessing a natural talent, an inherent passion for music, she had lately been beset by another passion—a passion for acting. Already the girl had twice performed most creditably in amateur theatricals, and urgently had she besought of her mother to be allowed to get up a play to be acted on her brother's birthnight.

But the Earl would not hear of it; he altogether disapproved of the project. It would interfere with the dancing. A few of his daughter's pet friends and acquaintances only would be able to witness the performance, for the one room that could be spared and transformed into a theatre had not accommodation for more than a quarter of the invited guests. Moreover,

Lord Bedingfield disapproved of his daughter's passion for acting.

Georgina could not carry her point. But though defeated in the main, she would not wholly yield. She foresaw that she could have, and resolved to have, some minor entertainment, something of the same character. The girl had a genius for producing picturesque effect. She felt certain something could be got up which, without interfering too much with the programme of the ball, should yet be very striking to the assembled company.

The Earl her father, although so given to cattle-breeding, considered it a duty attaching to his station to patronise art and artists. He was fond of patronising rising young painters, and not unfrequently became the purchaser of a modern picture which had struck him as interesting.

Lord Bedingfield's taste and inclination did not lead him to select very severe, very moral subjects; nay, he erred rather the other way, as the picture-gallery at Otteley could testify. Though such a thorough sportsman, though so addicted to agricultural pursuits, yet when a boy at Eton, when a youth at Oxford, his head had been well crammed with classical lore, and his favourite subjects were of remote Pagan origin. He had lately added to his collection one fine picture of this class in which the figures were life size. There was nothing indelicate *visibly* on the canvas, nothing indelicate in the attire of the lovely nymph who, crowned with roses, walked, surrounded by her attendants, daintily along. The indelicacy was in the history. The picture had been

described in the Exhibition Catalogue as "Phryne on her way to the Bath."

The Lady Georgina was a very accomplished musician, but her head had never been crammed with classical knowledge ; nay, she had never so much as looked into Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*. She had, indeed, not the most distant idea of Phryne's characteristics or avocation. She saw before her a beautiful picture of an effective procession. She saw on either side a line of spectators watching the procession as it passed along, and it occurred to her that, in the long ball-room, there would be just that glittering crowd on either side to give effect to what she herself could get up and take a part in.

Accordingly, with the help of her two most intimate friends, Lady Millicent Doyle and Eleanor Skeffington, Lady Georgina set to work. How delightful to young girls without a care on their minds is such exciting pastime ! Grecian garments must be invented, fac-similes of those in the picture. There were seven good-looking nymphs to be clothed, but only one lovely Phryne. And who should personate the lovely Phryne ? Georgina's two flattering friends declared that she herself must enact the part ; she was most suited to it. Lady Millicent had a Roman nose ; Nelly's nose was small and *retroussé*. They each, too, had the wrong-coloured hair, and at length Georgina consented. To her the mere spectacle would be nothing without the addition of music and singing, and now the musical friends rack their brains to recall some joyous-sounding Italian song with a chorus. Ah ! they have hit on the

very thing, and how assiduously did Phryne and her nymphs practise their various parts! Phryne, the finest vocalist of the set, must sing the solo parts, the others will but join in the chorus.

The Ladies Georgina and Millicent once set going, there was no limit to their theatrical ardour. What a pity that only one striking scene should be enacted! After considering a while, they resolved to get up two exhibitions. The second must be of quite a contrary character. Georgina, when one year wintering abroad, had been in the habit of attending various services in the chapel of a nunnery. She had been much struck by a procession of the holy sisterhood when attending a novice on her way to the chapel where she was about to make her vows and renounce the world. The scene had struck her as touching and picturesque; but if her eye had then been regaled, her ear had been far more so. The music-loving girl had been absolutely fascinated by the dirge-like chant which the holy sisters had breathed forth as sadly they glided onward.

Lady Bedingfield had had years of acquaintance with the priest who at this time officiated in the chapel of the nunnery. He frequently visited the Countess and her daughter at their hotel, and by his favour the Lady Georgina obtained an introduction to the abbess of the order, who graciously allowed the young enthusiast to have a copy of the chant, and a set of vestments such as the holy sisters wore.

Impressed on the girl's mind as it had been, seeing the mournful reality in her imagination so vividly even yet, the Lady Georgina felt certain that, having the

chant in her possession and the dress of a nun, the picturesque scene, the entrancing chant might serve her now. Yes, it was decided this should be the second subject which the little band of fair friends would enact.

We should remark, before we quit the subject, that, as far as could be, their work was done in secrecy. True, they were obliged to employ their maids' fingers and a dozen sempstresses of inferior degree. They were obliged to have recourse to the superior talent of a renowned *modiste*. But what the little band of friends were really about, no one at Otteley inquired. The rambling old abbey was so vast, there were portions of it so detached from the main building, that anything might well go on unobserved.

CHAPTER LXIII.

SEVERAL quadrilles have been danced. One has just terminated, so lately that some of the recent dancers remain as partners yet, and are promenading the length of the vast ball-room. Suddenly a strain of music steals into the apartment. It is not dance music. By degrees it takes the attention of the assembled crowd. At every succeeding minute the harmony grows more distinct. Two footmen enter, begging with many bows that a space may be left clear in the middle of the room, from end to end, as a little procession is about to pass that way. Scarce have these gorgeous liveried gentlemen made their obsequious bows and requests, when the threatened procession appears.

The Earl's latest-purchased picture is represented marvellously—to the letter. The beautiful Phryne walks first. Her dress is a masterpiece of Grecian elegance, and suits the wearer admirably. Never had Georgina Leigh shone to such advantage as now, in this classic costume. Georgina has exquisitely beautiful arms. They are displayed to the utmost, for the dress has but a gold ornament for a sleeve. Her hair, simply braided, is coiled around her prettily-shaped head; but two long tresses are left flowing, while a crown of

roses sits lightly 'mid the braids above. Georgina's attendant nymphs are attractive enough ; but Georgina, as Phryne, walking first with daintiest step, clad as might befit a Queen, she is the point of attraction. Then the song that breaks from Phryne's rosy lips is indeed fraught with a magic charm ; it tells of youth, of love, of joy, of gladness, and her maidens tender their aid how sweetly in the chorus that is repeated again and again. The gay and glittering crowd in the ball-room listens, gazes in delight, in gratification. There are but two amid that brilliant throng who are agitated by contrary, by cruel feeling. Our little Earl is one of these two hapless individuals. He stands absolutely aghast. God of heaven ! muses the girl's fond father, God of heaven ! what has the child been about ! Poor darling, he continues, all unknowingly, too. She asked me who Phryne was. I *could* not tell her, I would not ; and see what has come of my reserve ! The Earl was indeed so shocked, so nervous it made him to see his beloved child thus take upon herself a character so infamous, that drops of dew stood upon his brow.

How does his tortured heart find some relief as the song grows fainter and fainter, and at length dies quite away. Georgie is gone, but the fame of her folly will live. He scarce dare raise his eyes, lest he may see the men smiling wickedly ; for several of the younger men in that room had been guests of Lord Bedingfield's for the last week, and to them he had displayed the picture, and with some of them he had discussed the history of Phryne. Ah ! and a sharp thrill of

pain passes through the fond father's heart; for, at the far end of the ball-room, near the doorway by which his Phryne had just vanished, he *does* see a little group of sinners close gathered together. Every man there has doubtless a jest on his lips at his daughter's expense; and he sees the one man amid that group whom he had hoped might possibly in the future become his son-in-law, his Georgie's husband. At the first glance Lord Bedingfield could not catch sight of this man's countenance, his back was towards him; but now he turns round. Ah! no jest is on those pale lips. He is pale as death, pale with anger. Those idle jests are as poisoned arrows.

He thus wounded is a noble-looking young fellow, at the present time, however, undistinguished by fortune's bounty. But destiny decrees him a brilliant future. He is cousin and heir to an old Marquis of great wealth. This is the man on whom our little Earl had best loved to bestow his one treasure. And what has Georgie been about? Has she not brought upon herself to-day a notoriety, to say the least of it, most unenviable?

Lord Bedingfield glided from amid the glittering crowd. He shut himself up. He wandered about vainly trying to recover his wonted equanimity. He took but little part in the gaieties of the evening, and few, perhaps none, remarked his temporary absence.

Dancing had commenced anew. A dance, now forgotten, was in progress—the old-fashioned Spanish dance. Phryne and her attendant nymphs are yet invisible. All unconscious of the grievous breach of

decorum they have committed, the girls are laughing over their past success, and preparing to enact their second surprise.

Just as the Spanish dance is about to be relinquished, a bevy of yellow plush footmen appears at the entrance of the ball-room. Bowing low, trying their utmost to look grave, they make a request similar to that that their liveried brethren had made ere Phryne and her attendant maidens had entered.

But these liveried gentlemen have something more to do. In all haste, as the Lady Georgina had instructed them, they carefully extinguish every waxen taper. The arched, the monastic apartment, is lighted now only by the soft and hallowed light that emanates from the seven original pendent lanterns.

A group of young wits, of course of the masculine gender, has congregated together. Each one in that group is speculating wickedly on the character in which Phryne will make her next appearance. But lo! when jest is at its highest, peals forth from the chapel adjoining an organ's softest, saddest tones. Anon the swelling notes grow louder, then sink, dirge-like, low.

When every ear is listening, another and a sweeter sound awakens yet keener attention. 'Tis a distant chant of female voices. Another moment and the holy sisterhood, the novice's procession, in all its chaste, its virgin purity, passes before the eyes of the expectant crowd.

Nelly Skeffington enacts the part of the novice. She has a commanding yet a graceful figure. In her rich white satin robe she looks, she walks the personi-

fication of a high-born lady. Poor old pompous Sir Mounteney might well be proud of his daughter; and doubtless many others beside himself fully appreciated the lovely girl's nobility of carriage. But Phryne, who now enacts the inspired nun, Phryne, who sings the solo parts of the chant, Phryne, who walks with eyes upturned to Heaven, 'tis on her that every man is gazing.

Poor girl! how little as she so divinely warbled forth her part, how little as she trode that ball-room floor with such ecstatic steps, how little was she conscious of her error! But in happy ignorance of the whispered jest, how exquisitely touching was the girl's performance! Georgina's singing, the result of an inherent, passionate love of harmony, aided by long and careful training, might have moved any heart, and the heart that Phryne but now had so stabbed, the soul of the noble-looking young D'Abridgecourt, melted to a deeper tenderness as he listened to the pathos of the recluse's chant.

The novice's procession lacked nothing of seeming reality. Just as it had entered the ball-room, a priest, clad in those gorgeous robes we Protestants gaze on with wonder, a priest arrayed in cloth of gold, ruby red and flowing white, stealing in from a side door, joined it. Though the hallowed light that shone from the seven monastic lanterns was dim after the former blaze of waxen lights, it was noticed that the priest was masked.

The procession has passed; the tolling of the chapel bell, the dirge-like notes of the organ yet may

be heard, but the fair sisterhood has vanished ; their chant sounds only as the wail of the distant dying breeze. And the hundreds of spectators, as a bevy of footmen fly to the tall waxen tapers and relight them, as the band strikes up a lively air, ask, Has this been a reality or a dream ?

CHAPTER LXIV.

WE must now return to Helene. Although our master could play very creditably at whist, he was not at all given to card-playing, and it was not so very easy a matter for Lady Bedingfield with all her tact to get him into the card-room. At length, however, she does succeed in her purpose. She has the satisfaction of seeing him fairly involved. She leaves him seated at the whist-table with "my brother the Dean."

Our Countess was ever most apt at mischief. With all the vivacity and elasticity of a young girl, she instantly flies to Helene to warn her "that now is her time," to bid her "make hay while the sun shines." Laughingly she bids Lord Brailsford conduct Lady Daubigny along the gallery or corridor to the little dressing-room, "and you are to wait, of course, *outside*, at the door, until her Ladyship is attired. Do you understand, Stephen? And you are to bring your charge back to this very spot where I am now. I will sit me down here on this bench and await your return with all the patience of an angel.—My dear," continues the Countess, addressing Helene, "don't you find my son very much wanting in the little attentions, the little gallantries a man of the world so well comprehends,

and pays as it were instinctively? But go, don't stay to answer, and make what you can of Stephen."

Lord Brailsford faintly laughed, and together they went on their errand. It was a long low corridor they had to traverse, remaining much as it used to be when the abbey was bestowed on the Earl's ancestor, save that now its walls were hung with pictures.

"Who first thought of this little ruse?" asked Lord Brailsford as they went along.

"The Countess your mother, of course," answered the girl.

"You must not blindly follow all my mother's advice," says Stephen. "I am very fond of her, but am fain to confess she is not wisdom itself."

"You think I am doing wrong?" asked Helene.

"Not exactly *wrong* perhaps; but if Sir Charles does not know, it strikes me he may be offended, or at any rate a little annoyed."

"I wish you had not said this just now," murmurs Helene; "it makes me feel uncomfortable."

"You must lay all the blame on my vivacious mamma. The fair broad shoulders she has chosen to exhibit so very much on her son's twenty-first birthday want a little burden."

"You don't like her costume."

"Well, I confess I think she might have chosen a dress more befitting her years."

"Her years! Lady Bedingfield indeed is still quite young."

"I often tell her she is younger than myself." Lord Brailsford heaved a deep sigh as he spoke.

"You are serious on your birthnight."

"Ha! yes; but I will be gay. There, we are just at the door of your tiring-room. I am to wait *outside*. I suppose it may not be my happier fortune to witness the mysteries of the toilet."

"No," cried the girl, laughing; "not a very likely thing that you ever should."

"But she who adopts a French costume, and of the age of Louis Quatorze, might be supposed ready to conform to the manners there and then in vogue. Will you relent?"

"Good heaven, no! What has come to you, Lord Brailsford?"

"But a minute ago you complained I was serious; now by your heightened colour I perceive I am again at fault. No, indeed; believe me, I did but jest. I honour you with all my soul."

As Lord Brailsford spoke he heard a sound of footsteps on the oaken boards of the gallery; he turned and saw a figure not far from him, muffled in, or rather disguised by, a black domino, wearing a mask.

"It is very strange," continued Stephen with a start. "I seem to-night to be pursued by a black domino. When I was by you in the ball-room, twice a similar person appeared watching, nay, I thought listening."

"Have you no idea," said Helene, "who it can be?"

"Not the slightest. But who can penetrate such a disguise? It might be the devil himself."

As the young Lord said these last words, he laid his hand on the old-fashioned lock of the door by which Helene was to enter the appointed tiring-room.

“Good-bye,” cries the girl as she enters. “Have patience; I will not keep you waiting long.”

And it was a marvel to herself how rapidly she became transformed into Julie de Vancluse, for such was the name the Countess had admonished her to adopt. Not only was her own woman in attendance, there was also a French maid, the latter personage instructed by Lady Bedingfield to dress our little Gipsy’s hair.

Lord Brailsford was naturally little addicted to mirth, but when Mademoiselle Julie de Vancluse stepped forth from the tiring-closet, he could not resist a laugh; the Helene he worshipped was so entirely obscured, her beautiful hair brushed off her forehead and powdered, only two large roll curls on her shoulders, and they even blanched, a little black silk mask covering eyes and nose, and the dress, too, to him it appears grotesque,—the short, very light-coloured blue satin petticoat, the white silk-flowered train bunched up on either side, the stiff-pointed bodice with its lacing in front, the little muslin *fichu*, making the too low bodice more discreet, the lightest blue stockings with rose-coloured clocks, the high-heeled shoes with rose-coloured heels, the black silk mittens, the fan of celestial blue and gold. Ah! we have forgotten to say that on one side of the panoply of powdered hair was pinned a miniature wreath of rosy rosebuds.

Julie is perfect, and forgetful of her husband’s possible displeasure, Mademoiselle de Vancluse, leaning on Stephen’s arm, returns to the ball-room,—returns in a state of childlike levity. True to her word, Lady Bedingfield is still seated on the bench by the door.

She is discoursing, however, so intently with a black domino, that she starts when her son and the masked lady interrupt her.

With a little whisper to the black domino who is sitting on the bench beside her, Lady Bedingfield arises. Performing with ostentatious ceremony a pretty half-bow half-curtsy, as though Stephen were introducing a stranger, she next inquires in French if *Mademoiselle de Vancluse* will dance. On receiving in the same language a favourable reply, the naughty Lucy bestows her son as a partner.

A waltz tune of exquisite melody, half-sad half-joyous, has just struck up, and in a few minutes Julie de Vancluse and Lord Brailsford, in that sweet close contact he had dreamed of as he wandered in the park the day before, are threading their way amid the many couples, who, light of heart and light of foot, are whirling gaily down the vast apartment. After a while Julie tells her partner that she is tired, she would rather sit down.

He begs for one more turn. He can tell that the girl is weary, she rather leans upon him. Oh ! moment of ecstasy ! That that another sort of man had scarce noticed, to Stephen, endued as he was with such acute feeling, enthralled as he was by a first passion, that little hand leaning on him was ecstasy. Yet, like the waltz tune that resounded through the old monastic apartment, there was a touch of sadness in his gratification. The music seemed to harmonise with the sorrow and the momentary joy of his destiny. Anon the sad strain swept amid the gay and the thoughtless, and

died away as the dirge-like wail of an Æolian harp, to be succeeded by notes telling only of energy and gladness.

Rudely, however, was Lord Brailsford awakened from the sad sweet thrill of delight that had stolen over him, and by words that faintly broke from Julie's lips: "*Je me sens indisposé,*" murmurs she; "*J'ai mal au côté terriblement ! Il faut que—*" but a spasm of pain was so fierce that that sentence was lost. In a moment she continued, "*Je puis à peine me supporter.* We are near the door, the corridor."

The young Lord comprehended, and the half-fainting girl, leaning on his arm, re-entered the corridor. Julie had hoped to be able to reach her little tiring-room; but her hope or rather her purpose was thwarted by another spasm and by another attack of faintness. The girl, incapable of standing, was now supported wholly by Stephen's arm, and precisely at this trying moment the black domino stood beside them.

"The mask must come off," said this shadow of evil and darkness, and rapidly and without asking permission he undid the black ribbon that kept it on.

"Pardon me, my Lord," pursued the black domino, flinging back the hood that concealed his features, "but perhaps you will suffer me to take your place. This lady by marriage is my near relative."

"Captain Daubigny!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Precisely so; and you must admit my better claim to fulfil such an office."

"I do not admit it at all," replied Stephen haughtily.

Julie, slightly recovering, recognised the voice of

Daubigny. The sound seemed to rend her very soul. She burst into an hysteric passion of tears.

"Madam," said Daubigny, "will you not admit that if any arm supports you it should be mine?"

"Lord Brailsford," murmurs the girl, "do not leave me."

"Never," cries the young Lord, "unless you command me; and, sir, I must beg to remark that your conduct during the whole of the past evening has been singular, for I now comprehend who has been dogging my steps."

"My Lord," retorts Daubigny, "does not my position entitle me jealously to watch over the honour of this lady? But I will not stay to parry words with you. My Lord, another time may serve us better. I go to seek my uncle. He, at least, is authorised to interfere."

As young Daubigny uttered the last words, he hastily readjusted the disguise he had partially cast off, and then in anger and in haste disappeared.

In the middle or about half-way down the gallery was a projecting window. Was it an oriel window? I know not how to term it, but it was high up in the wall, and under it was an angular recess. Before Captain Daubigny returned with his uncle, Lord Brailsford had assisted the half-fainting girl to reach this niche of refuge. She trembled so, however, from nervous apprehension and from the pain in her side, that she had still to lean on Stephen's arm for support. Thus the poor little culprit stood when her astonished husband presented himself. To describe the mingled expressions that darkened Sir Charles's usually bene-

volent-looking countenance would be impossible. Anger, nay, even fierce anger, flashed from his great dark eyes as he fixed them on the frightened girl. She dared not meet his angry gaze. Her little pocket-handkerchief, that tiny square of lace drenched with tears, formed a screen.

"This, all this," he cried, as he stood before the sheltering niche, "this I am called upon to witness is utterly incomprehensible. Will you have the goodness to inform me, Lady Daubigny, how and why I have been fooled, imposed upon?"

"Oh!" answers Helene, "never mind now; only let me get back to Brierly. I am too ill to care."

"Too ill to care!" repeated Sir Charles derisively; "and, pray, what has caused this sudden attack of illness? When I left the ball-room you were perfectly well."

Lord Brailsford now came to the girl's rescue. "I was dancing with Lady Daubigny, when suddenly, in evident suffering, she asked me to leave the room with her. She mentioned the corridor. We had scarcely left the ball-room and gained its seclusion when she fainted. There is, Sir Charles, as you may perceive, no seat in the whole length of the passage, and had it not been for my timely aid your wife had sunk on the oaken boards."

Lord Brailsford's simple, straightforward manner, the knowledge that *his* arm and not his nephew's had supported the girl, somewhat pacified the poor husband, yet he proceeded with a very natural question asked in no amiable tone of voice:—

“Pray, my Lord, may I take leave to inquire how and why my wife assumed the foolish disguise in which I see her? My nephew bore in his hand the mask she had on, as he said, when she fainted.”

“It has been all a piece of my mother’s folly. I give you my word, Sir Charles, that she alone contrived the little ruse.”

“And, pray, may I further inquire how it came to pass that my nephew should be so close at hand when my wife fainted? How was it that *he* was so mixed up in the affair?”

“Captain Daubigny, in his present disguise, has been officiously attentive to my movements to-night, but until he threw back the hood of his domino and discarded his mask, I was not aware to whom I was so much indebted. He followed us here when we left the ball-room, consequently was a witness of Lady Daubigny’s faintness; nay, he wished to offer his services, and on my declining to give place to another, he instantly went in search of you, sir.”

Sir Charles silently bowed his head. He seemed still in a state of amaze, but his fierce wrath had subsided. And now the girl with trembling steps leaves the angular recess, and putting a little hand on her husband’s shoulder, beseeches him only to take her home.

“The best place for a person so wanting in prudence,” answered her angry Saint; “but at present we cannot leave, my carriage will not be here for another hour or more.”

“If Lady Daubigny desires so much to leave,” cries Stephen, “I will order one of our carriages.”

"Oh! how can I thank you sufficiently?" says Helene.
"Pray do."

Scarce had she given utterance to her wish, scarce had she besought him, when Lord Brailsford hastened on his errand.

"There is a little room," continues the girl, now addressing her husband, "there is a little room at the end of the gallery where I put this dress on. Help me to get there. Give me your arm. Hannah is waiting."

Sir Charles began to be satisfied that his wife's illness was not the mere effect of agitation, and he helped her, as she desired, to the little tiring-closet.

Happily the French maid had run off to get a peep at the dancers and the maskers, and Hannah was there alone.

Another quarter of an hour and Stephen taps at the door announcing the carriage.

Covered over by that great fur-lined mantle which St. Amour had arranged so cleverly when the poor girl started for the birthnight ball, covered over now in utter carelessness of flower, or gauze, or ribbon, Helene descends the short flight of stairs, reaches the hall door, and gets into the waiting carriage.

Stephen, when she is in, holds out his hand. She gives her little mittened and jewelled hand, and receives such pressure as a lover offers to his mistress.

We have said that Lord Bedingfield felt too much wounded in spirit to return to the ball-room. As for the Countess, she was as little up in classic lore as her

daughter, and was yet in complete, in happy ignorance. Moreover, her Ladyship's mind, as we shall have occasion presently hereafter to show, was deeply occupied with another subject, to her of supremest interest. So our hapless little Earl wandered about coveting only solitude and silence. Now he was in one place, now in another; now out of doors pacing the dark yew garden alley, now in the forsaken library, now in his own dressing-room. Half a dozen times had he changed his mind as to reappearing at all again amid his merry guests, ay, even at supper-time. Well, at length for the third time he quits the old yew walk; the irritation of his mind makes him restless. Not knowing where else to find within doors a deserted room, once more he turns into the library. This is a long, low-ceiled room, lighted only now by the wood logs that still burn on its hearth. It is a cold room too, and to make it warmer one of those old-fashioned folding-screens, covered with scraps, stands opened out near the fireside. Lord Bedingfield is so disturbed he does not feel the cold, and he seats himself at the far end near the door. We know that he entered the room believing it to be tenantless. How does he start when he hears his daughter's voice?

The Lady Georgina is evidently by the hearth, the screen effectually hides him from her view. He hears her speak in an excited, in an angry tone; he can tell that she is weeping. Silently he listens.

"You have said the most cruel things," cries Phryne, "how can I ever forget them? How could you dare to believe I was conscious? If you had felt

any respect, any real attachment for me, you would have known that I did it in ignorance."

"I confess," answered a voice which the Earl recognised as that of Captain d'Abridgecourt's, "I confess I sinned grievously. I ought to have felt certain, and yet, at the moment, it seemed almost impossible that you could have been ignorant."

"Well, sir, since you so misjudged me—"

"For heaven's sake, Georgina, have some compassion! If you but knew what it was to me, if you but knew how, for the last year, I have been living in incessant misery, dreading to make known to you my feelings lest I should be repulsed, watching with intense anxiety lest some more fortunate man might step in—"

"And withal you choose to insult me? Was that the way, think you, to succeed? Go from me! How can I bear even to think of what you have said! Have you not told me that I have made myself the jest of mankind? Have you not told me that the odious name will cling to me for ever?"

"Great God! how could I have been so insane! I am a passionate man, Georgina; my temper, I confess, is at times ungovernable."

"A happy escape for me every way, sir. Leave me, I command you!"

The Earl could stand no more. Was the girl going to fling away that honest heart, that nobly constituted nature? Was she about to annihilate his own long-cherished hope? The little man starts from his chair; another instant, and he has passed the screen; his arm is around his daughter.

“Georgina,” he says in accents hoarse with sorrow, “you have grieved me once to-night, inadvertently I know, but cruelly. Will you, my child, yet grieve me further? Unintentionally I have overheard a part of your discourse. I bid you, if you love me, I bid you forgive the Captain. He has been over hasty, but—”

“Oh, papa,” cries the girl, resting her head on her father’s bosom, “you do not know all he has said.”

“Forgive him, Georgie. He thought that you sinned knowingly.”

“And if I do forgive him I shall be wretched, when every one supposes I am an impudent creature. How can I be seen again? Not to-night, that is certain.”

“My love, my love,” cries the fond father, “dry your tears, compose yourself; you shall return with me. I will not quit your side.”

“And may I not too claim a place?” asks the love-sick Captain almost falteringly. “My Lord, I know that I am scarce justified in my present poor circumstances, I know that my proposal must seem rash, premature; but if of your great goodness you could permit—”

“My dear fellow,” cries the Earl, “make it up with Georgie. You will not find me obdurate. Your father was my earliest and my best-loved friend. He had an honest heart, and, I believe, Will, you have a good heart too. The stingy old chiel your cousin may linger on a many years yet, but what of that? I can spare my Georgie a decent income. Damn it, what’s fortune without a heart?”

"Georgina, do you hear what your father says?" murmurs the noble-looking D'Abridgecourt.

"O yes, I hear," answers Georgina haughtily.

"But you do not agree, that is evident," again murmurs the unfortunate lover.

"Perhaps not; why should I be in such violent haste?"

"I comprehend perfectly," pursues D'Abridgecourt, "some happier fellow, some fellow with greater present advantages. Ah, Georgie, you may well demur. I may be dead and buried long before him. Fool that I have been! Georgie, 'tis I who will not be seen again to-night; I will not stay."

During this last part of the discourse Lord Bedingfield had stolen to the other end of the room, hoping that the lovers would make it up.

"Did I tell you to go?" asks Georgina, turning her gaze on one of God's noblest works, for D'Abridgecourt was noble-looking as he was worthy in heart.

"Your indifference, to feel assured of your indifference as I do now—"

"Did I say I was indifferent?" asked the girl. "Can't you wait till to-morrow morning?"

"No, by God, I can't," cries the Captain. "To be refused coolly, systematically; to be told that on consideration it is too great a risk, that you may have years of indigence, dependence. No, Georgie, now or never." The noble-looking pauper laid his hand on the girl's wrist and fixed his mournful gaze upon her, then with a sad smile he added, "Phryne, farewell; thus terminates my hapless life. The long

years to come will be *not* life. Farewell, there will be nothing."

D'Abridgecourt turned towards a second door there was in the centre of the long room, but with an agile step the girl followed him. He had reached this door, which led into a dark narrow passage. As he set his foot into this seldom-used passage, he felt Georgie's little hand arresting his progress.

"Willie," she murmurs.

"What?" asks he with a heart beating wildly.

"Why should I come here if I do not want you?"

He pauses, he casts his arms around his Phryne, he presses her to his heart; he could not control himself, he kissed the girl passionately; she was his—his own Phryne.

As the Lady Georgina freed herself from her lover's embrace, which, to say truth, was nowise unwelcome to her, for until this minute she had always thought D'Abridgecourt's nature stoically frigid,—as she freed herself from this miraculous and daring revolt against propriety, and together they re-entered the dim old library, they were both surprised at hearing some one in discourse with the Earl. Another instant and they saw that the speaker was but a footman, and they heard him continue—

"Yes, my Lord, her ladyship desired me to go everywhere in search of you, my Lord, and give you this," holding out a ball programme.

"Georgie," cries the Earl to his daughter, "your young eyes are better than mine. See if by this

flickering blaze you can make out what your mother has written ; the devil a bit I can."

"Papa, dear, you needn't call up the devil," cries Georgie, kneeling down before the glowing wood embers and examining the card.

"I'd better bring a light, if your ladyship will allow me?" inquires the man who had borne Lucy's commands.

"No," answers the girl, "I can see. Willie, just give the wood a stir."

With what alacrity the joyful lover obeys! The sleepy log sends up a hundred sparks and one bright blue blaze, by which Phryne reads—

"Why on earth, my Lord, have you absented yourself this hour and a half or more? I positively cannot and will not have supper announced until I am assured you will be present. Stephen looks like a ghost, and I am quite overcome with fatigue. Write on the card that you WILL be in your place at table to ease the mind of your Lucy."

"Poor love, she has had a night on't! There's ink here. Write, Georgie, for me; but no, she'll take that amiss; give me the pen," and Lord Bedingfield, kneeling before the embers, writes:—"Lucy dear, it's all right now; you may have supper announced; I'm quite ready."

"Carry this instantly," says the little Earl, rising from his knees with some effort, "carry this to Lady Bedingfield, and, do you understand, when I am wanted tell butler to come here and give me notice."

The serving-man bows and departs to do his errand.

"Now, Georgie," continues his Lordship, "are the tears dry, are the curls set in order? You're to go into the supper-room with me, you know."

"Well, but I hardly know whether I can."

"O yes, you can."

"I shall look a fright, anyhow. What with being so vexed and—"

"Well, my dear, whatever you look it'll be real, natural, and it's quite time you did appear in your natural character; twice to-night you've been seen painted up."

"Don't I look a perfect fright, Willie?" cries the girl, turning to her lover; "ain't my eyes all red, and my nose; and my hair all ruffled?"

There is no time for further remark. A portly personage enters the library and delivers himself of his lady's message—

"My Lord, my Lady says you must come to the supper-room instantly."

And Georgie, leaning on her father's arm, a sweet consciousness, "shown more in the eyelids than the eyes," with the colour mantling on her cheek as she thinks of the folly she has committed, is threading her way up the crowded room, and is presently seated beside that fond father's chair, D'Abridgecourt every now and then, as he stands behind her own, bending down and whispering some fond, some grateful lover's raptures. Happy, happy Georgie!

CHAPTER LXV.

MY young reader may or may not be conscious that leading from various old abbeys have accidentally been discovered passages of considerable extent formed underground. Of these subterranean passages, by which the holy monk might convey himself elsewhere, unseen by his less holy lay neighbours, doubtless good use was made. Accident had discovered to a former Lord Bedingfield that Otteley Abbey was thus provided. The Earl of that day was no less eccentric than the Earl we are endeavouring to portray. He had a taste, as it would seem, for underground life. The passage thus accidentally discovered he had carefully repaired, and an octagon-shaped enlargement or excavation which was found in the passage, he had turned into a room to which he might retire when a fit of melancholy stole over him. Sixty years had passed since this octagon-shaped room had been completed, decorated, and furnished, yet it still remained in very tolerable order, and at pleasure could be warmed, lighted, and rendered habitable.

The present Lord Bedingfield had seldom cared to visit this cellar, as he termed it; but the sportive Lucy had occasionally had it aired and lighted up, that to

those of her frequent guests yet uninitiated she might display this "evidence of insanity," as she would laughingly call it, in her husband's family.

The Countess had ordered this seldom visited and gloomy apartment to be in readiness on the occasion of her son's birthnight ball; nay, she herself more than once during the preceding week had descended to it by the monk's passage, to see that the servant whose business it was to attend to the fire *kept a good* one burning on the hearth. 'Tis the chill dawn of a November morning. The maskers, the dancers, the graver and older folk who have been at the birthnight ball are now proceeding homewards. The country road—usually so quiet at this dubiously-lighted hour, when the moon still rides high in her glory, and yet the abbey clock proclaims aloud 'tis morning—the country road, usually so quiet, testifies of the past gaiety; some of the people had come as many as ten or fifteen miles to attend the party. Their four post-horses are clattering onwards 'twixt the now leafless hedgerows. Some nearer neighbours, or humbler or stingier people, are creeping up the hill at a snail's pace with one poor horse or a pair.

The last carriage has at length drawn up before the abbey's porch of entrance. The Earl, in high good humour, because he loves his daughter, because he believes that Will d'Abridgecourt will make her happy, the Earl, in high good humour, and not a little elevated by the oft-repeated glasses he has quaffed at supper, stands just within the picturesque old porch, giving his last good-night. Stephen, it is presumed, has

retired to his own apartments, for he is nowhere about. Georgie sits by the drawing-room fire, sipping coffee with three of her dearest girl friends, who look very wise, and her Captain, who looks rather conscious and spooney. And where is our naughty Lucy? Her Lord supposes, as he has been told, that, quite overcome with fatigue, she has gone to bed. But, alas! women oft-times send messages with a view to deceive. Lucy is not in her bed; Lucy is not in her chamber; Lucy has not yet flung aside her too bewitching costume. Ah! sad to tell, the Countess, with noiseless step, has glided through the monk's passage, has some time since reached the subterraneous chamber. The still lovely woman sits by a little table, close drawn before the logwood fire. One ungloved and bejewelled hand supports her head, her bare elbow rests on the baize covering of the table. Her cheek, even through the rouge which habitually she wears, is flushed. Her great and soft and tender blue eyes tell only of love. Lucy is not alone. Desmond de St. Brie, the Romish priest, the lover of her girlhood, is in that chamber too. He is pacing the small octagonal room in evident emotion.

"Lucy," he says, "there was a time when such a change in my position would have seemed but as the wildest dream. But now its probable accomplishment can only be a question of weeks or months. My unfortunate cousin's case is utterly hopeless. At his own request I visited him last week. I found him propped up by pillows; his cough was fearful. He is pronounced to be in the last stage of a consumption. We had not met since his and my boyhood, when he

seemed to have almost as poor a chance as myself of ever being where he has reigned the last ten years. He told me that until he consulted the old family lawyer he was not aware that the estates were entailed on me. He was very candid. He said that until he had had that consultation he had contemplated making a will. He conjured me to renounce my present faith, my present vocation. At first, Lucy, the destiny, the future destiny that may be mine, seemed like a wild dream, and nothing more. It was some time before I could believe, absolutely believe, in my own altered position. But having accustomed my mind to the belief, I became a prey to the most cruel depression. Of what use to me that splendid old English home? Could I alone there find any interest in life? Then bitter and terrible reminiscences overwhelmed my soul. Then it was that passion, tempestuous, uncontrollable as the surging waves, once more took possession of my being. What if I did renounce my present sad vocation? What if I changed back to my early faith and became Master of Elynbridge? Can you not guess, my Lucy, can you not guess what else I coveted? Can you not imagine all the forbidden hopes that thronged upon me? Canst thou not imagine that that I dare not ask? The sacrifice I dare not, yet I would propose."

As Desmond St. Brie finished speaking, Lucy lifted up her beautiful countenance. But in another instant, to avoid the wild gaze fixed upon her, or rather to shut it out, her hand is before her eyes; for the priest, his green eyes dark under excitement, his brows knitted,

his hands pressed hard together, his breath coming short and quick, stands regarding the one thing he covets, the fair object of his desire.

What a moment is this for Lady Bedingfield, aged thirty-eight, still lovely in person, her heart full of an indestructible passion! Here is her first, her ever-devoted lover, offering to bring scandal unspeakable upon himself, ready to resign his holy office if she will but share the home, the wealth that destiny decrees shall be his!

What a fearful struggle is in the woman's heart! Her bosom, clad only in the loose-fitting garments peculiar to the reign of Charles the Second, shrouded only by the lace-trimmed chemise beneath, visibly heaves with anguish, with repression of forbidden thought.

"Desmond," she murmurs, "it may not be. I could bear all but my children's scorn. Nay, I could scarcely bear to break *his* heart. In his odd way he loves me very much. It would be a ruined, blasted home. Georgie has, beneath her liveliness, deep feeling; she loves her father; she would never forgive, she would never see me more."

"Lucy," cries the priest in accents broken, tremulous, telling of the heart's despair, "Lucy, it is enough. Alas! why have I sought to lead thee to perdition? Yes, yes, remains for me the same weary, isolated life, until God in mercy grants me a release."

"Oh, Desmond, dearest Desmond," answers Lucy, "let me beseech thee, let me add my prayers to those of thy dying kinsman. Forswear, forsake the Romish

Church. Oh! thou didst join it but in rashness, in infatuation; 'tis but ambition chains thee to it."

"Nay, my sweet Lucy," cries the priest, a sad smile on his lips, a touch of sarcasm beaming from his eyes, "if thy scruples and thy virtue are of such strength as to sunder us for ever, I change not; I still pursue my aim. Long has my life been monotonously dull, but in the future I may count on greater scope for the ambition thou condemnest. Success, more onerous duties to perform, harder work for the brain, will at least bring me something of oblivion. A life of idleness, of ease, fortune secured, would make the penance to which thou hast condemned me too heavy. Harry may take my place; to him such a destiny will be without a thorn."

"Do not in haste cast away that which Heaven provides, provides as in mercy, to snatch thee from a world fraught with dark schemes o'erlaid with tinsel glory. Do not reject thy better fortune. Oh, Desmond," continues Lucy, now gazing on her lover imploringly, "dost thou hear me? All that I may give of tenderness, without bringing sorrow on my children, shame upon myself, shall be thine."

"Alas! Lucy, there was a time when, hadst thou thus spoken, I had listened, I had hoped. But what can restore that peace, that apparent goodwill there used to be 'twixt him and me? In a moment of frenzy hast thou not made him jealous? Does he not wrong thee? Does he not almost doubt—"

"Nay, Desmond," murmurs Lucy hastily and in sweet confusion, "there is no need to speak further,

no need to clothe thy meaning in words. I comprehend. Pardon me, Desmond, but it seems to me thy residence abroad has made thee less careful. But, indeed, were I to grant my Lord his former privileges—”

“For God’s sake, Lucy, keep him where he is,” cries Desmond. “’Tis the only good thy quarrel ever wrought me.”

“Oh! but, dearest Desmond,” murmurs Lucy, her soft blue eyes in modest shame cast down, “tell me, has our life been happier since that my day of candour and of frenzy? How terrible to be obliged to meet thee thus by stealth, to receive thy letters trembling lest his jealous eye catch the well-known characters, and to receive them seldom! I hate thy priesthood, thine holy office; my mind oftentimes misgives me. Oh! thou art under temptation too strong for man always to resist.”

“Great God! Lucy, canst thou suspect me of infidelity? I swear to thee that I have borne the penance of severest chastity. This from thee! Oh! it is too much. To what hast thou condemned me? Oh! better that I never gazed upon thy loveliness if never I may touch nor taste. No traveller in the desert dying of unslaked thirst— Why art thou rising? Why this haste? O go not yet!”

“Thou scarest me. Call up thy self-control. O do not stay abroad. There is a change in thee. Thy words trench on impropriety; thy wild and eager look— Oh! Desmond, love me, love me tenderly, love me every moment of thy life, but only offer me such homage as I dare receive.”

“Be not surprised if to-night, in much unwittingly, I have transgressed, if my words have passed discretion. Hope had so winged my love, it bore me upwards to a giddy height. Ay, I thought I felt the summer sun again. I thought I wandered with thee as of old, inhaling all the perfume of the flowers around us. My soul, its darkness went; my soul was clad anew. Thy coldness or thy prudery dashes hope lower than the earth. O God! I scarce know what I say. And wilt thou leave me, Lucy, in this dark abyss? Wilt thou not grant me one embrace, one drop of water to a dying wretch?”

“Desmond,” cries Lucy, “call up thy self-control. I thought that years had taught thee reason. Think of all that I have said. I go, I dare not stay.”

She is gone, she is gone.

CHAPTER LXVI.

My reader may remember that we left Georgie sipping a cup of coffee by the drawing-room fireside, together with Will d'Abridgecourt and some few of her favourite girl friends.

The Earl we left at the hall door. For the last half-hour or more before we noted his Lordship's position, he had been occupied in the abbey's fine old hall, giving hearty shakes of the hand to many of his departing guests, the liveliest bows and smiles to those of the decamping crowd less known to him. He had grown somewhat chary of his words now, for of late he had become so enormously fat that it was no small difficulty to him to pronounce words distinctly. A man who habitually drank at least his bottle a day, Lord Bedingfield was seldom affected (to show it) by wine drinking. But at the great supper over which to-night he had been presiding, and under such happy excitement, he had so far exceeded all rational measure as to be scarce master of his speech or his imagination.

The last carriage rolls from the abbey door, and our noble friend crosses the hall and enters the drawing-room.

"Come, Georgie," he murmurs, advancing towards his

daughter and putting his arms around her, "come, it's long past cock-crow, and you not in your little nest yet. Come," glancing at the other girls, "come, you young innocents, you mustn't let the dawn peep in upon you here."

"Oh, papa, pray don't disturb us *just* this minute. I am so tired, and it's almost the only rest and peace I've had for hours and hours."

"*Must, must,*" continues his Lordship. "Lucy's abed; no one to see after you. Georgie," he whispers, "plenty o' time for courtin' to-morrow—next day."

"Papa, dear papa," murmurs the blushing girl, who begins to see what state of elevation her father is in, "yes, I had better go, and you too, dear. Won't you? We'll go together. Willie, will you ring for the night candles? They won't be in the hall as usual."

Lord Bedingfield has now placed himself with his back to the drawing-room fire. His recent exertions in the chill night air make welcome the glowing warmth the fire emits. As he stands thus conspicuously before the little group we have named, arrayed in his black silk stockings, his black silk knee-breeches, his white waistcoat and blue coat, the never-absent voluminous roll of white cravat round his short, bull-like throat, half burying his little dimpled chin in its snowy folds, as the Earl thus stands prominently forth, the fire light behind him throwing out every portion of his figure, he reminded young D'Abridgecourt of the poor prize animals who can hardly breathe, and can scarce wait in life the leisure or the convenience of the butcher. The enormous calves to his dwarfish legs, the stomach, clad in

its white waistcoat, forming such a protuberance as nearly reached to the knee, the cheeks so puffed out, the lips so full, so deeply red, no wonder our noble friend had grown slow of speech and difficult to understand.

But despite the oddities of her father, Georgie really loved him, and she soon succeeded in carrying him off. They proceeded together all right up the great staircase, they even reached his Lordship's sleeping apartment without delay or obstacle. Here Georgie had hoped to deposit her charge; she had hoped to leave him in the hands of his old valet Marston. But the birthnight ball had turned every one's head. Old Marston was making merry below. Moreover, to Georgie's utter dismay, a fancy suddenly came into her father's head. He was determined "to go tell mamma to-night the news."

We are sorry to say that our naughty Lucy had never since "the day of her candour and her frenzy" shared her husband's apartment. And this is the first time since that luckless day that her Lord has ever thought of invading her privacy. But elevated as he is, no remonstrances or entreaties of Georgie's are of any effect, and, in despair, the girl leaves him at her mother's door. Georgie is too happy in herself to venture into that room. She feels certain the Countess will dislike such untimely intrusion. She will go to bed herself and dream sweetly of the future. The same careless Lucy, who in her girlhood had dropped or mislaid her cousin Desmond's love-letter, is often the same careless Lucy still. Unwittingly or unthinkingly now to-night she has left her chamber-door unlocked,

thereby enabling her Lord to detect her duplicity. He enters the room, he sees her not, he naturally concludes that she has already gone to bed. He walks up to the bed, he draws aside the curtain, but, alas ! he finds not the little wife. He finds no sign of recent occupation ; smooth and unruffled are sheet and counterpane.

Ah, reader ! try to behold our noble friend at this hapless moment as he stands beside the bedstead incredulous, amazed. A French bedstead it is, with a laughing Cupid painted *au naturel* hovering over it. Its curtains are silk, of *couleur de rose*, trimmed with lace, the counterpane to match. The Earl, homely and true of heart, stands by his fine Lady's gewgaw bed like one stricken. He had entered his wife's pretty perfumed chamber all hope, all joy, all glee ; but now ice is on his heart, and his hands grow icy as his heart. He sinks into a chair, he buries his fat and puffy cheeks, his bewildered eyes in his hands. There is nothing of his face to be seen, only his round bald head, for the chair he has chosen to sink into is set before Lucy's toilet-table, and his elbows lean on that. The shock to the soul already has well-nigh sobered him ; if the empire of wine does anything now, it is to add depth and dread to his suspicions.

By the chiming of a gilded French clock perched on a gilded bracket, the Earl hears one quarter of an hour succeed another, and thus nearly an hour of anguish passes.

But at length, at length on his straining ear falls a sound. It is Lucy's footstep ; and, all unconscious of her husband's presence, Lucy is in the centre of her

room. As she approaches her toilet-table, where two waxen lights are burning, with a wild start she exclaims, "Good heavens! how came you here, my Lord?"

"Madam," hoarsely retorts Lord Bedingfield, "how came you absent?"

"I will not have this espionage practised upon me," cries Lucy angrily. "Go, my Lord, go."

"Madam—I shall—*not* go. An hour here—very nigh an hour I've been. Ere I go—explain."

"I will never satisfy your idle curiosity," cries Lucy haughtily. "Is it possible you could condescend to watch my movements?"

"No, Madam, no. Came to tell you a piece of news; came to tell you it's to come off 'twixt my Georgie and Will—settled. But, God of heaven! Madam, what's anything to me now? This damned masking—a planned thing;" and once more covering his face with his hands, the scarce sober Earl burst into a passion of tears.

Lucy had naturally a tender heart. The sweetness of her nature beamed forth even in her soft blue eyes. She approaches her Lord, she leans over him, one soft hand on his shoulder; she says, "Everard, do you hear me; your suspicions are wholly unfounded."

"Explain, then—explain. Why did you send a message to me saying you were weary—quite overcome?"

"Well, but indeed it was true. I could curtsy and smile and talk and stand no longer. I felt almost faint. I went into a quiet place."

"Then your maid told damned lie. Bedroom—go to bed it was."

"Celine's a fool always," cries our naughty Lucy. "Come, forget this nonsense. Let me hear more about Will and Georgie. I know, Everard, that pleases you."

"No, it don't."

Lucy began to perceive that her spouse was a trifle under the shadow of the grape. She hoped to cajole him into comfort. "Will you let me see you to your room, my dear Everard?" she asks in a sweet but yet scarcely steady voice. "To-morrow morning you will wake quite surprised at your own wild thoughts."

"Shan't budge an inch, Madam. Here I am; here will I stay. The devil himsel' shan't move me. Had you explained—different."

"And are you going to sit here all night watching me like a madman?" asked the disconcerted Lady.

"No, Madam; I'll throw me on your silly painted bed."

"And what will befall this dear little hairless head?" cries Lucy, laughing; "can it escape pain and peril without its dear little white cotton nightcap?"

"Madam, is it handsome of you to make game of my baldness?"

"I do not make game," cries Lucy, now growing provoking; "but it does remind me of an apple—no, not an apple, a rounded peach; yes, there's a little down upon it still. It isn't so round, neither. I can see the organs of suspicion, of inquisitiveness, my Lord, standing out prominently."

"Nay, Madam, for aught I know, there should be vaster prominences. In men's eyes my head may be akin to that of one of my own herd."

"My Lord," answers Lucy with a provoking smile, "I never have attempted so to adorn you; but if it would make you happier to bear a closer resemblance to one of your own pets, with a little of my own connivance, and with some of your contrivance, I think it might be managed."

"Lucy," cries her Lord, "you are in-cor-rigible."

"My Lord, a man whose breath is so short ought not to indulge in such long words. They will be your an-ni-hi-lation."

"I see, Madam, your object is to sneer at me till I get into a damned rage. You hope to provoke me to quit you, but nothing you can say shall move me. Explain, Madam. Was *he* here, the hyp-o-crite who for years infested my house, for whose sake you have driven me from your apartment?"

"This, my Lord," cries our haughty Lucy, "this is utterly untrue. Reverse the case if you please. 'Twas *you* who chose to drive me away. Never shall I forget that party at Richmond when you stole away from me with the dark-browed Jewess; and afterwards, did I not see you watching her intently as she went up the rustic steps?"

"What!" cries his Lordship, "can I believe it? No, it was a little ruse of yours, Lucy. You wanted to pick a quarrel; jealous of her! bandy as a bull-dog, Madam."

"Then I have to thank those rustic steps for a cure of your passion."

"Passion, Madam! you're enough to make any man in a passion; but I'll be calm. You won't succeed in your object. You'll not get me off the scent. Madam, I demand an un-equivocal answer. Tell me, was that saint-like humbug with you but now? Was Desmond de St. Brie the companion of your retirement?"

"I will never condescend to answer so impossible, so ridiculous a supposition," cries Lucy, still affecting a playful indifference, but in reality shuddering at her husband's persistency.

"My sup-po-sition, Madam, is neither impossible nor ridi-culous," gasps his Lordship. "Why have you shut me out of your apartment? Why, when once, only once in two years, I've entered it, why were you absent?"

"And is it such a grievance, my Lord, that we lie apart o' nights? What is there in that?" asks the Countess.

"Not to you, O no, Madam. But what may be sport to one may be torture to another. You won't explain."

"I'll do something better," cries Lucy, "that is, with your permission. Will it quench the fire of your jealousy to have me back? Ah, yes; take me once more to the region of boots and buckskins. Take me, Everard; be with me; watch me night and day. Like another Millamant I see I must bid adieu to my dear liberty, to my faithful solitude, to my darling contemplation (sighs and quotes): 'Adieu, then, my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumber, all ye douceurs, ye sommeils du matin, adieu.'"

"Pray, Madam, include in your senti-mental adieus your hov-ering cupid here, your gew-gaw French bed, for which you have so long, so un-reason-ably, so un-justi-fiably forsaken mine. Would I could forget the day, the hour you did so—the cruel words were spoke."

"I was angry, I was jealous, I was in a rage," murmurs Lucy, blushing even through her powder and her rouge.

"What?" says the Earl, "what did you tell me? that on our marriage-day you ab-so-lutely loathed me; that you were bar-barously torn from your cousin; and that if I wanted a witness of the passion burning in your soul for another, I might find it in Stephen's strange weird eyes. Madam, I ask you now, to-night, was it *only* the passion burning in your soul that set that damned brand upon the lad? God knows I've scarce ever met his glance since without a shudder."

"I tell you," cries Lucy, "I was jealous, and I said anything that came into my head merely to provoke you. But for Stephen's eyes, they only show a family likeness. Isn't poor Desmond my own first cousin?"

"Poor Desmond! he who, child as you were, had—"

"When I'm jealous," cries the Countess, "I'm always half mad. I declare sometimes I've felt quite enraged to see you toying with Solomon."

"Ha! ha! to be sure."

"Yes, I hated you for a whole week when I knew you'd given a thousand guineas for the monster. Can

you find any other woman's husband who ever paid such a price for a bull?"

"And han't I a right to give myself *one* pleasure? Lucy, Lucy, have I ever stinted you? A thousand I paid Rundell and Bridge for your diamond necklace."

"I should like to hang it on the monster's horns, I should," cried Lucy petulantly. "Pray let him wear it at the Christmas show."

"Didn't I give five hundred for your portrait?"

"Did I want the portrait?" asks her Ladyship.

"No, no; 'twas I, Lucy, and I looked upon it with pride and with love till that damned hour. Ah! that I could blot out—"

"Shall I go down on my knees and once more protest that I spoke but in jealous frenzy?" cries the Countess, gently putting her bare and lovely arms around her Lord, and gazing sweetly upon him.

"No, child," cries he, returning the embrace, not, however, artificially, phlegmatically as 'twas given. In his embrace was manifest all the yearning and the passion so long repressed.

"You need not be *quite* so demonstrative, my Lord," cries Lucy, laughing, as she seeks dexterously to extricate herself from her Lord's loving arms, trembling lest a portion of her *belle chevelure* may be left on his noble bosom or in his grasp. The fact was, that in order more perfectly to counterfeit Lely's well-known portrait of the fair, frail Shrewsbury, her Ladyship had been compelled to have recourse to additional tresses. Her own soft silky ones did not vie in length and abundance with those of the famous lady she sought to

imitate. Celine had twisted in, with inimitable skill, the long flowing false hair; but neither maid nor mistress had contemplated the embrace of a husband, who, for two years, had been denuded of his rights—who had lived in a state of famine during that long period.

CHAPTER LXVII.

'Tis midday in November, 'tis the day succeeding Stephen's birthnight ball. Autumn has stolen slowly, softly o'er the land this year; no wail of wind, no wildly drifting leaves. In thousand varied tints the fallen leaves rest where they fell, rest on the short, fine, lawn-like grass beneath the parent trees. There is a genial mildness in the dewy air, a hush, a sad yet sweet serenity. 'Tis just the sort of day when the dreamy idler loves to wander, loves to dream. Leaves, brightly tinted leaves yet linger on the mountain-ash, and berries, berries far brighter still, hang in abundance, pendent. The native blackbird yet has spared to touch, the stranger throng of noisy thrushes has not sought as yet to reap its annual harvest.

'Tis a strange, varying, fickle day; breaks forth e'en now a gleam of golden sunlight. We gaze, and as we gaze rolls a-down the woody and the undulating vale a cloud of mist. 'Tis gone; and rests once more on Stephen's home, on that vast mingled pile, a golden halo. In its grey, its dim irregularity, how picturesque looks Otteley! We venture near: we see the ivy stems crossing, woven like network, o'er the abbey's crumbling walls, o'er that portion of the building long disused.

Oh, ye old ivy stems, ye older walls, had ye but voice to speak, what strange romantic truths ye'd tell! Of what deep sorrows would ye breathe! Ye would tell how all that seemed so bright, so passing fair, was false. Ye would tell how wrong went everything on earth.

Young hopeful reader, want ye a proof that all things are distract, awry on earth? Here is proof. Behold the future Lord of Otteley! Rapid his footsteps as he treads the dewy grass, and marked by strange irregularity. They tell the tumult of the soul. Ah! see, by a short cut known to him from childhood, he threads his way through brake and dell to Brierly. Not long have we to watch, so rapidly he walks. How soon he gains the bridge where Helene last saw Daubigny, last saw him ere the last night's sad encounter at the birth-night ball. Onward walks Stephen. Perhaps his steps, his gait grows more unsteady as he nears the house. Once there, he pauses for awhile, gazes round. Fain had he stolen in rather than ring and be announced in form, for he is on a secret errand. But the hall door is closed, no window open, and he perforce must ring. He rings; a footman to whom he is well known answers the bell.

"Is Sir Charles at home?" he asks.

"No, my Lord, I'm sorry to say Sir Charles is out. He was obliged to attend the great meeting to-day at Guildford." Oh, Stephen! what simulation has thy secret passion taught thee! Thou didst know or believe that our master must be out.

"Can I see Lady Daubigny then?" asks his young Lordship.

"I'm 'most afraid, my Lord, that your Lordship cannot," answers the man; "my Lady's very poorly. Her woman told me but now she couldn't come to luncheon."

"I have a message for your mistress. Will you send her maid?"

"You'll please to come in, my Lord," pursues the man. Stephen bows his head and follows his conductor to the morning-room.

O what tokens of a careless girl in this room are strewn about, tokens of yesterday's carelessness even; Helene was always careless. Her work she'd worked at lately, a pair of crumpled gloves, an embroidered pocket-handkerchief unwittingly she had dropped this very morning, a blue ribbon that had been around Pug's neck, a bracelet. At another time Lord Brailsford had regarded these little tokens with all a lover's idolatry, but now, now too great a weight is on his heart.

'Tis some short space before grave Hannah comes. Stephen thinks that she will never come, and when she does appear she stands before him stiff as any poker.

"Can Lady Daubigny see me?" asks Stephen.

Hannah gravely shakes her prim, neat head. "She's a-lying down, my Lord, on the bed, trying to get a little sleep."

"Go," cries he, his green eyes dark and brilliant, "go tell your mistress that I have a message about something she feels an interest in,—something that happened last night. Nay," continues he as he glances on Hannah's hard, matter-of-fact countenance, "give

me a slip of paper ; I have a pencil," and his demand complied with, he writes but two brief sentences.

How soon she comes ! Before she had lain down she had loosened her clothes and put on a white muslin dressing-gown. She had not stayed to change it, nor even to readjust her hair, which hangs down in long tresses somewhat dishevelled. Her cheek is flushed, her eyes look heavy, her hand trembles. What is she to hear ?

" You have come to tell me something," says Helene in tremulous excitement.

" No ; I have rather come to *ask* you something," murmurs Lord Brailsford. " Soon after you left last night, your nephew " (with a sarcastic smile) " your nephew chose to seek a quarrel with me. But it is not exactly of the quarrel I came to speak, it is of the falsehoods in regard to yourself. He told me that you loved him ; that long before his uncle had married you, there had been passages of love betwixt himself and you ; that his arm, *with your consent*, had been where mine unavoidably was last night when you fainted ; that you had granted him other favours. I was incredulous, I was amazed, and I believe in my indignation I told him that he lied. You may imagine what followed. Unless I retracted my words, unless I apologised—but that is nothing. I want to know whether there is any, the slightest truth in your nephew's assertion. Lady Daubigny, in these grave circumstances, I think I may venture to ask."

Lord Brailsford stands gazing on the girl intently. She is sitting in a great arm-chair. As he pours out

his words her eyes are averted. As now he stands before her, his gaze, his clear, bright, honest gaze is too much for her to bear. She leans an elbow on the cushioned chair, and shades her face with her hand. What is she to answer? the truth? Yes. She sees that, to save the fiery jealous twain from strife, she must speak the truth. But oh! how cruel, when those young honest eyes are gazing on her, to have to confess, to drag to light her early folly.

"You do not speak," says Stephen, and an anguish indescribable is thrilling through his soul.

"It *is* true," murmurs the girl; "he *has* spoken the truth."

A sigh—no, an exclamation of suppressed despair—breaks from Stephen; he seems unable to stand, and sinks down on the nearest seat.

"Yes," repeats our Helene, "it *is* true;" and then slowly, with agitation, with effort, now in bad French, now in childlike English, she recounts all that had passed at Avonmore between Daubigny and herself,—how she had suffered him to put his arm around her waist as they sat on the rocks by the river-side; how, as thus they sat, he had drawn from her a promise of meeting him once again, when they should breathe their last farewell.

At length Helene comes to the most exciting, the worst feature in her story. She tells how she listened for the great clock at Avonmore to strike eleven, how she saw the sinner glide from the shrubbery. "Ah, oui," she murmurs, "even now my heart trembles at the memory. *L'échelle s'appuie contre le balcon.*"

Lord Brailsford during the early part of Helene's recital had never moved, never raised his head, but as she murmured forth, "*L'échelle est contre le balcon*," he starts up from his seat. How he looked, what were his movements at this trying minute she knew not. She dare not herself lift up her downcast eyes; her own agitation was such she noted not that of her companion.

But her task is over, her story is ended. She has told how our master, as an apparition, suddenly appeared, to his nephew's dismay and her own shame. She has even explained how our master had gained the information that led him to secrete himself and interfere.

By this time Lord Brailsford had again cast himself down on to a seat, on to an embroidered ottoman that stood before the girl's *escritoire*. His elbows rest upon its velvet desk, his features are hidden from her view.

"You think me a worthless creature, I dare say," murmurs she timidly, a few seconds after her recital had ended.

Lord Brailsford gives no answer.

"But indeed, indeed," continues Helene in a voice full of agitation, "I am all truth, all honesty now. Never have I deceived my husband. I have indeed been scrupulously exact from the moment I became engaged to him."

"Then Daubigny misrepresents you damnably," cries Stephen hoarsely. "Tell me, did you never meet him at the play?"

"I met him there, indeed; but on my part the meeting was purely accidental, and I told Sir Charles on my return."

"And did you tell him *all*, Lady Daubigny? Did you tell Sir Charles of the little souvenir that your nephew contrived to bestow? He bade me challenge you on this point," continued the young Lord, now gazing on the girl with eyes that told of passion and despair. "You wear it."

"'Tis true," murmurs Helene tremulously, "he did leave a little locket in my hand, but indeed I never had it on. Ever since that night it has been locked up."

"He bade me ask you if you wore it," repeats Stephen.

"Look," cries the thoughtless girl, unfastening the white muslin dressing-gown and closely approaching Stephen, "see for yourself. Have I it on?"

"Its absence at this moment is no proof."

The girl burst into a passion of tears. "You think me so full of falsehood," cries she, "that you are at liberty to doubt my every assertion. You scorn me. Oh, 'tis very hard that almost the only creature for whom I have cared, and who seemed to care for me, should be thus set against me. I was almost a child. I erred, and shall I find no mercy?"

"Does your husband know you have that locket?" continued Stephen.

"No, he never knew."

"And this deception—what is it else?—can you justify it? I shall see Daubigny again very soon. Give *me* the locket. Let me return it to him and thus prove that he lies, at least in some degree."

"No, no," cries the girl, "I will not. It would but fan his anger into fiercer life."

"Fan his anger into fiercer life!" repeats Stephen. "Have you still, then, so much tenderness for this drunken reprobate?"

"I only mean that your quarrel shall be no act of mine," cries Helene.

"Say rather," answers Stephen, his features so lit up by intense feeling that Helene saw before her as it were the spirit of himself, "say rather that your soul clings, cleaves to the past; say that Daubigny, all fallen, lost as he is, yet holds you captive. You cherish at least his memory."

"No, no, I do not cherish his memory."

"But answer me, does not the memory too often intrude?"

The girl was silent.

"I go," said Stephen, seizing his hat and approaching the door, "I go but too well satisfied. God only knows—"

Helene waited not to hear what further escaped the young Lord's lips. She started from her chair, she threw herself between him and the door. "Yes," cries she, weeping, "it was but right that I should sacrifice myself; better, though I lost your regard, your respect, that I should speak the truth and so end your quarrel. Lord Brailsford, answer me, I have a right to demand it, you will not hesitate *now* to apologise?"

"You need not fear so much," cries Stephen almost sarcastically and with a bitter smile, "you need not fear so much, Lady Daubigny, for *him*. If the worst come to the worst and harm befall either, that harm will fall on me. I am no crack shot. Daubigny is an unerring marksman."

"For heaven's sake do not talk this way! You cannot mean— Lord Brailsford—"

"O no! Of course we shall come to an accommodation," answers Stephen with a feigned levity in his manner; and again he approaches the door.

"Promise me, promise me," cries Helene, in her eagerness laying a little gipsy hand on Lord Brailsford's far whiter one. "Oh! in mercy, in pity! For every one's sake. Oh! what an effect it would have on Sir Charles to find you at deadly feud, and I the cause! Alas! and what would the world say of me? I would rather die myself now," continues the impetuous girl in frantic anguish, tears gushing from her eyes as she spoke. "Oh, my papa, too! What would he say? He who has never known, never suspected my folly, my falsehood! Yes, I would rather die! You cannot be so obstinate, so inhuman, when I have thus humbled myself by confessing every particle of truth."

"*Have* you told me *every particle* of truth?" asks Stephen, now turning his gaze full upon the girl and laying his other hand upon her arm. "I ask you before God, have you kept nothing back?"

Suddenly occurs to Helene's mind the three other encounters she had had with Daubigny, the first in the passage of their London hotel, the second in the back parlour of the house at Dover, the third in the copse at Brierly, and in the midst of agitation and tears she details these.

There was such an air of truthfulness in the girl's voice and manner as sentence after sentence broke

from her trembling lips, that whatever had been Stephen's suspicions they fled.

"Do not take this matter so to heart," he murmurs. "Whatever comes of our quarrel I will undertake for myself, and I believe I may say as much for Daubigny, —whatever comes of our quarrel, its cause shall never transpire."

"Oh, but there must be an end of the quarrel to-day, at once," and with all that grace that nature had bestowed, the girl sinks on her knees before Stephen. "See me," she cries, "the humblest of suppliants. Is it more humiliating, more cruel for you to have to apologise to *him* than it has been for me to have to tear from obscurity my falsehood and my folly, making you, you who cared for me last night, detest and scorn me to-day?"

Hoarsely and sadly Stephen answered, "Rest in peace. Do not distress yourself. But remember, it is for you to keep the secret, even from your husband. Let him not know the cause of my coming—a call, only a call of civility, that is all," and leaving the girl even as she knelt on the floor, Stephen fled away.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE bell resounds and tells 'tis dinner-time at Brierly. Our master, much against his will, had been detained at Guildford, even after the great meeting there was over. He did not return home till it was just his usual time for dressing. Hence he had no leisure to observe his wife until together they sat down at table.

But now he gazes on her with suspicion, with a new-born fear. He cannot but believe the paleness of her usually bright complexion is occasioned by the last night's encounter with his nephew. A frown, which had been long absent from his soft dark brows, knits them. His manner is gloomy and *distract*, while Helene smiles but faintly, speaks with effort, and can scarcely eat a tithe of her usual dinner.

In the presence of old butler and his assistants Sir Charles does not choose to complain, but following the little wife immediately after she rises from table, his expostulation commences almost as soon as she has seated herself by the drawing-room fire.

"And so," says our master, as he stands on the rug regarding the girl, "and so the patient has suffered a relapse, and there is perhaps more danger to be apprehended now from this sickness of the heart than at any

previous stage of the disease." So far Sir Charles had spoken almost as in raillery, but he could not keep up the half-playful tone in which he had commenced his attack. The smile has passed from his lips. A seriousness is in his manner as he continues: "Of what avail has been this flattering period of hope, of fancied security? In a moment all my reliance, my confidence, is swept away. He has but to appear, and your very being sustains a shock. You, who usually have a colour, to-night have none. Your appetite is gone. You scarcely speak, or speak with effort."

"Indeed," cries Helene, "you are mistaken. My eating so little does not arise from the sort of thing you would insinuate, nor did my faintness last night. When I fainted I had no idea he was in the house. I feel sick. I feel different from what I ever did in my life."

"If such be the case," cries Sir Charles incredulously, "it is high time that you saw a doctor."

"O no! pray do not have a doctor. Perhaps to-morrow I may be better."

"Helene," says our master, "let there be no evasion. Was it because my nephew crossed your path? Was it the memory of the past that so agitated you,—that now, I should say, so upsets you,—or is it a sensation of bodily illness?"

"I do assure you," murmurs the girl, "that I feel a kind of something almost like faintness. I feel oppressed. My heart flutters, my side aches. What can these ailments have to do with your unfortunate nephew?"

Sir Charles is silent. He presently quits the room. He is, in fact, gone to question Hannah. From what she says he is better convinced that Helene's ailments are not merely the effect of agitation. He therefore determines forthwith to summon a doctor, and writes a few lines requesting, if possible, a call this evening from Dr. Softly.

Our master does not return to the drawing-room till it is just about his tea-time. He returns, however, much more amiably disposed towards the little wife. But on entering the room he finds new cause for anxiety. He sees the girl as he has never yet seen her after dinner. She is lying at full length on a sofa, and is fast asleep. He stands by, and he watches, and he listens to every breath she draws, and he feels certain that she breathes with less regularity than usual. Moreover her countenance wears a sad expression, a shadow seems to rest upon her sun-ripe beauty, even as a cloud might dim a summer sky.

The tea-tray comes in, borne by one man. Another follows close upon the heels of his liveried brother bearing the hissing urn. How the noise these poor fellows make jars on Sir Charles's nerves! He holds up his almost trembling hand. He signs to them to make no noise, he points to the little wife stretched on the sofa. In an instant they comprehend. They know that a note has been despatched to Dr. Softly, and they walk on tiptoe and disappear as soon as may be.

Our master, weary with his unpleasant day at Guildford, and now almost feverish with anxiety, is glad

of his tea. He had felt too much done up to care for his dinner ; but tea, in his estimation, is ever a restorative, a consolation ; and so while the girl sleeps on in profound unconsciousness, noiselessly he makes the tea, and is in the act of drinking a second cup when one of the already warned footmen enters cautiously and informs his master that the doctor has arrived.

"You can bring him in here," murmurs Charles Daubigny, a thrill of apprehension running through every nerve as he speaks.

Helene, having once fallen asleep, was not soon to wake. Nature, so tried, must have her way at last. The girl sleeps that sort of deep heavy sleep that often follows suffering, whether it be bodily or mental. She lies on the sofa, Pug by her side, just as a very child might have lain there. Her white muslin dress, on the skirt of which Pug reposes, and her blue and silver sash, are crumpled up anyhow. When she cast herself down her heart was too full of care for muslin or ribbon to have a place in her memory. One hand in her sleep had evidently been wandering amid her hair, for the arm is still raised and her hair slightly dishevelled.

"There is your patient," says Sir Charles almost in a whisper to the doctor, as together they stand by the fire ; and the medical man, turning his eyes in the direction indicated, for the first time beheld Lady Daubigny.

"Shall I awake her ?" continues our master.

"By no means," returns the doctor. "You said in your note, Sir Charles, that your lady complains of

oppression. I shall have a better opportunity of studying the breathing while her ladyship slumbers and is unconscious of my presence."

The doctor accordingly drew nearer to the couch on which Helene slept. For a minute or two he stood by it silently regarding the child of earth on whom nature, as though to make amends for the girl's want of kindred, had smiled so sweetly.

As long as the doctor stood at a respectful distance from the couch, as long as he kept in an upright position, Pug neither moved nor growled; but with all a dog's exquisite sensitiveness or wonderful instinct, Pug knew the doctor to be a stranger, and when the stranger approached a pace or two nearer to the sleeping girl, and bent down to listen to her breathing, Pug's eyes were fire, and he threatened to fly at the unknown intruder.

The dog's fierce growl and bark instantly awakens Helene. Unconscious where she is, or who is present, in saddest accents she exclaims, "O Pug, how can you be so cruel, when I had dropped asleep, and was at peace, to wake me!"

Sir Charles, as we know, sensitive to the last degree, dreading lest any more unconscious words might escape his wife's lips, with a haste that seldom marked his movements, instantly interposes betwixt the angry Pug and the listening doctor.

"Helene," says our master, "Dr. Softly is here. He has called to see you at my desire."

"Oh!" cries the girl, lifting her head from the sofa cushion; "how could you send for him without telling

me? I know nothing about English doctors. I never spoke to one in my life."

"English doctors are not in the least more to be dreaded than foreign doctors."

"Oh, yes, but indeed they are. I have heard papa say so. I have heard him say they are awful pompous twaddling creatures. What with Pug startling me out of my sleep and your doing this, I am past everything," and the girl burst into a passion of hysteric tears.

"Softly," cries Sir Charles, turning towards the doctor, of whose presence in the room Helene was yet wholly unconscious, for when Sir Charles approached the couch he had glided noiselessly away,—*"Softly, here is evidence that you are especially required. My wife is not subject to hysterics and passions of tears."*

The physician, whose countenance was all benevolence, whose manner coincided admirably with his name, now ventures to approach. In accents full of tenderness he begs her ladyship's pardon for having intruded without permission.

"Oh!" cries Helene, endeavouring to stay her tears, "it is not your fault. Sir Charles only is to blame."

"I see," cries Sir Charles, a little petulantly, "that I have committed a grievous sin, but, Helene, your irritability convinces me that the doctor has not been sent for too soon. I will leave you for a while. My presence in such a case could only be unpleasant.—Pug, Pug," whistling the dog, "you must want your evening run."

Pug was only too glad to stretch his legs. Our master and the dog disappear, and Helene finds herself

alone with an "awful pompous twaddling English doctor."

Before we proceed further it may be well to remark that Dr. Softly, although a resident in the village nearest Brierly, was no ordinary country practitioner. Within the last ten years he had been well known in London as an eminent ladies' doctor. His health, however, had so completely broken down that he had been compelled to make over his fine practice to another, and seek restoration in perfect quiet and a purer air. On the small fortune he had inherited, added to the yet smaller one he had made as a ladies' doctor, he now lived respectably, and almost in seclusion, yet never disdaining a proffered fee in exchange for his experience.

Lady Daubigny is now alone with this man, so skilled in female ailments. She has to undergo many and minute inquiries, to which her answers are sometimes so childish the doctor can scarce maintain a perfect gravity. We shall not dare enter on the dialogue between the inexperienced girl and the learned physician. It will be sufficient for our story to give the conversation that ensued after the examination was over,—the conversation between the nervous husband and his amused neighbour.

The Brierly hall, like the rest of the house, is of fine proportions, and is luxuriously furnished. Its warmth does not alone depend on the logwood fire which blazes cheerfully to-night upon its hearth. Warm air is admitted through filigreed brazen ornaments inlaid

in its marble floor. Persian carpets stretch between these warm apertures. Lamps shed an ample light on every object, useful or decorative, the hall contains, and by this ample light some of the fine paintings that adorn its walls, some of them tell their own story.

Sir Charles, in the gravest anxiety, awaits the doctor's opinion. He has been pacing up and down his great hall. He has been trying to sit still by the blazing fire in the hall, but the conference between his wife and the doctor seems to occupy so much time, and his apprehensions so increase as the minutes pass, that now he stands with his eyes fixed on the drawing-room door, a prey to acute nervous dread. Helene may be sickening for measles or scarlatina, both of which in childhood she had escaped, or she may be on the high road to some worse complaint. At length our master hears the sound he has been so painfully awaiting, he hears the opening of the drawing-room door, he sees the doctor emerge, but his smiling countenance gives no indication of bad news. Doctors, however, always veil their fears, and inwardly shuddering, Sir Charles says, "Softly, no bad news?"

"No, indeed," answers Softly, "no bad news. On the contrary, I must take leave to offer my warmest congratulations. There is nothing to apprehend. Ladies under such circumstances are frequently a little hysterical. The faintness last night may have arisen from undue pressure. Lady Daubigny admits that she suffered from the tightness of her dress."

"I am scarcely certain that I apprehend your words

aright," broke from our master, while an irrepressible agitation sends the colour to his temples. "Am I to expect—"

"About May, I should say," continues the doctor; "that is, as far as I can collect, but," with a smile, "your lady, Sir Charles, is so completely uninformed in such matters—tells me" (with a graver manner) "that she has had the misfortune to lose her mother in childhood."

Sir Charles sadly bows his head.

"Is it wise, my dear sir? is it well that Lady Daubigny should have no married person near her? No one to give her a caution—a hint?"

"Is my wife in a delicate state of health? Do not, out of consideration for my feelings, withhold your opinion."

"Lady Daubigny, I believe I may say, is perfectly healthy, but even the healthiest, most robust women suffer during the period. We must expect a certain amount of disarrangement, and, in my opinion, there should be some one a little experienced in such matters who could now and then suggest a remedy."

"And will not *your* advice, your daily or frequent visits, obviate the necessity? I should be sorry to have to displace my wife's present attendant, a very well-conducted person, of whom you must have some knowledge—at least so I should imagine—Hannah Wright."

"Ah, yes, indeed, her late mistress was long a patient of mine. Yes, I remember Hannah."

"Well, doctor, I again repeat—that is, with all deference to your better judgment, I inquire—with

your constant visits—your professional advice—may we not go on without a change? Were you not so near at hand—were you not so experienced, so eminent—”

The doctor bows, he can scarcely conceal his satisfaction, but warily he answers, “I should feel some delicacy; I might be deemed intrusive.”

“Your professional visits cannot be deemed intrusive. However frequent they may be, I shall not complain. Nay, they will greatly add to my peace of mind.”

“Sir Charles,” murmurs Softly, “how can I sufficiently acknowledge your goodness, your confidence? It is indeed a balm to a broken-down man like myself. Lady Daubigny shall have my very best attention,” and, holding out a hand to our poor master, and receiving a warm, friendly pressure, the doctor seeks his greatcoat, his woollen scarf—wraps of more than ordinary texture—not that either coat or scarf was heavy and cumbersome, Dr. Softly possessed nothing that was heavy and cumbersome—his greatcoat and his muffler were of the lightest, the warmest, the most delectable material.

The doctor’s search is in vain. Sir Charles tries to discover the missing articles, and, while thus engaged, resumes the subject lately before them: “You feel assured, Softly, that you cannot be deceived as to the origin of my wife’s ailments.”

“I feel perfectly assured,” replies the doctor. “Every sentence Lady Daubigny uttered in reference to her various sensations confirmed my impression. My only uncertainty is as to the precise period when you may expect your lady’s accouchement.”

As the doctor delivers himself of this decided opinion, St. Amour, like a gliding spirit, appears bearing on his arm the missing coat and scarf. He says that one of the men had moved them by mistake, but the fact is, he had been behind a curious old carved screen listening, and had had the doctor's coat and muffler there too. Not a word of the conversation had escaped the crafty valet. He was now perfectly assured of that which he had suspected.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CHARLES DAUBIGNY was taken by surprise. He had never contemplated such an evidence of his infatuation. Ah! now that the doctor is gone, and he lingers for a few minutes alone in the hall, he feels the first sting of remorse, the first wakening of conscience, and that wakening sends a sharp thrill through his soul and the colour to his brow.

He knows that he has sinned against the girl. She had offered him the purest, the holiest of love, and the very purity, the very holiness of her love had been repugnant to him. He who had set out by teaching her to pray to the God of all sanctity had ended by seeking to corrupt her young heart. How ceaseless had been his endeavours to wean her from her first, her girlish passion! And at length her constancy had failed, and she had become false to the dictates of nature.

And having conquered, having beguiled, what delusive happiness the conquest wrought in our poor master! His sojourn at Breeds Place had been as a snatch of bliss rescued from this world of woe. He forgot the past; he thought not of the future.

But now, here to-night is set before him a momentous fact,—a fact to create serious family disarrangement,

dissatisfaction; and he cannot but shudder himself as he contemplates Tresham's possible disappointment.

Nevertheless Charles Daubigny feels that he must at once face the difficulty, and treat it, if he dare, as a matter of self-congratulation. Yes, he must return at once to the drawing-room and speak to Helene cheerfully of what the doctor has informed him.

That which had been almost as nothing to the greater part of mankind is to our martyr to sensibility a severe trial.

Ideas we know can flash through the human mind rapidly as lightning flashes through the skies. And now, in the next few fleeting moments, our master is persecuted by the ludicrous side of the picture. What will George say? Of what amiable sarcasms will he deliver himself in view of the long-depressed and debilitated invalid coming out in this novel character? How will Augusta sneer, and smile, and hint? And Holcroft? what suppressed amusement will the deep old lawyer indulge in when he discovers there is a probability of so unlooked-for an arrival!

But our master makes a determined effort to gain an ascendancy over his own unwelcome thoughts, and enters the drawing-room with a smiling face. Yet the smile on his lips is contradicted by the paleness of his cheek, by the anxious expression of his great dark eyes. It matters not, however, how he looks, for the girl, lost in mournful reverie, half-reclining on the sofa, has her eyes closed, her face turned to the sofa's back, and even when Sir Charles approaches and speaks, she does not alter her position. A hundred contending feelings are

struggling in her young heart, to most of which she dare not give expression. She listens, indeed, to her husband's tender rhapsody, to all his reasons for self-congratulation, but no word he utters wakes in herself an answering echo.

At length he tells her that God never yet created a human being, never vouchsafed to endow a soul with a ray, a beam of his own glory, without a good purpose; that she may rest assured if he permit a little Daubigny to be born it should be regarded by her and by himself as a token of the Almighty's favour.

Hereupon the girl could restrain the vehemence of her impassioned nature no longer.

"You say all this," cries she, "merely to reconcile me to my position; but you may as well reason with the winds. When I was born, was my birth a token of God's love and mercy to my parents? Oh, you are all wrong! I was but an evidence of my mother's shame, my father's sin. A soul is created, perhaps, always for a purpose, but life is given not to bless, but to wound, to bow the haughty spirit, to bring contrition. How must Helene Vane have felt when she heard my first cry or watched my first smile! You know she never returned to England, never saw a relation afterwards."

Sir Charles, on hearing this vehement contradiction to the comforting suggestion which he had set forth shuddered, especially as the name of Helene Vane, so seldom heard, had been pronounced to send even now a thrill through his whole being. But he would not give up, and after a moment, recovering

his self-possession, he added, in a voice musical as it was sad, "And were you not created for good, Helene? Where had been your father if that little life, unwelcomed, undesired, had not been granted? I firmly believe his own hand had terminated his existence. And dear, dearest child, have you not to me been even as an angel of light? Until I loved you, I can truly say I felt indifferent to everything I possessed."

"It seems to me," murmurs the girl, with a deep sigh, "but a sad affair. But how vain are our calculations! God in mercy may give both child and mother a grave; the same hour we may die together, and then all will be right again."

"Helene," cries Charles Daubigny, "I will not have you indulge in such gloomy forebodings."

"No, no," murmurs the girl, weeping, but not passionately. "No, I ought not. I will try to be better. But the world is all wrong,—that is, my world. Wherever I tread are thorns. Think what hatred, anger, sorrow may come of it."

Sir Charles cast himself on the sofa beside his wife. He reminded her with the deepest tenderness that every provision should be made as far as possible to soften the bitterness of disappointment to him most concerned. "My child," murmurs our master, "I will not be unjust. You have nothing to fear from me, for my unhappy nephew shall not suffer."

Otteley Abbey has been restored to its customary state of order. No trace is left of the recent masquerading. Festoons of artificial flowers have fallen

into the laughing housemaids' lap, have been carried off in their work-a-day Holland aprons. These birth-night garlands may, perhaps, serve to decorate their own Sunday bonnets and the hats of the village children for the next year to come. Festoons of coloured lamps have been taken down and slyly appropriated by the village plumber, who bought them with Lord Bedingfield's own money and set them up at his expense.

Carpets, or rather Persian rugs, again partially cover the old oak floor over which the dancers lately lightly whirled or lounged in idle vanity.

Yes, the Bedingfields' country home wears the same air of comfort and repose it wore before the birthnight ball, and yet by each of those who love and rule within, by each of those who bear the name of Leigh, a change is felt. Fortune, ever whimsical, had claimed that night of dance and song and revel as her own.

Lord Bedingfield, as by a miracle, has won back his Lucy. She has forsaken her hovering Cupid, her gewgaw French bed. She has returned to the region of buckskins and boots. Like Congreve's Millamant, she has bidden adieu to her faithful solitude, her darling contemplation. Wonderful had been the change her complacency or her submission had wrought upon her little Lord. His suspicions are lulled, his countenance wears a kindly smile for every one.

And Georgie, engaged to D'Abridgecourt, may now be seen wandering with her lover in the park, or loitering with him alone in the secluded library. What visions of happiness are arising, what unexpected bliss! Full

of astonishment and delight is the girl at finding that he who often before the night of the ball had appeared to her sarcastic, indifferent, almost unkind, now that the burden that oppressed him is lifted from his mind, is all that she could desire. For months she had been doubtful whether he cared for her. She had flirted with other men, she had said and done provoking things to try whether thus goaded he would confess his love. But so great had been his pride, so heavy had pressed his poverty on his mind, that he had never under any circumstances cast off his reserve. Yet at length to her inadvertent folly, which by mankind might be construed into unblushing audacity, to her appearance as Phryne the girl owed his confession. He had been transported out of himself. For the moment he had forgotten his poverty. He had showered reproaches, he had declared his hopeless passion.

And now, as they wander or they loiter together, Willie ventures to whisper occasionally, and the girl blushes at *his* new-born audacity. Yes, he dares to whisper that the name of Phryne for him will have an undying charm.

And the Countess gazes upon the young lovers, and involuntarily indulges in mournful reverie. The happiness of her daughter awakes sad remembrances of her own girlhood, of her own short-lived and secret engagement with Desmond de St. Brie. Lucy's lively spirits are subdued. That interview in the underground chamber, the impassioned, the enduring attachment of the isolated priest, the news he gave her of his

probable change of fortune, are such things as must dwell in her mind.

Lucy even forgets to tease her little Lord. Perhaps for the first time in her life she is pensive, she is passive.

We have yet to touch on Stephen, we have yet to show what the turn of fortune's wheel had wrought for him. He had been living in a state of wild delusion. He had been hoping, nay, he had brought himself to believe that Helene, wedded almost in her childhood to a man old enough to be her father, could never have experienced such love as lovers feel. He had been vain enough to imagine that he himself might be destined to awaken in her unpractised heart a passion responsive to his own. His hope and his vanity lay now crushed and dead. And this was not all. Daubigny, full of suspicion, would not let their quarrel rest, and an intimation very lately received from Monsieur St. Amour had so deepened the suspicions of the heir-expectant, had so added to his distraction, there was no chance of escape from his malice.

CHAPTER LXX.

'Tis the afternoon of a November day, the sun, that had shone but feebly, fitfully during the morning, is dispelling the white mist now. A ray of softened glory rests on the abbey's western walls, and tints how beautifully many a majestic half-stripped tree and many a grassy knoll within the park.

D'Abridgecourt, who delights in out-door life, has persuaded the Lady Georgina that a walk in this gleam of sunshine will do her good, and dressed in a sort of russet suit, the girl at this moment descends with him the old oak stairs. How clear, how musical, how happy sounds her voice as laughingly she discourses with her lover!

On reaching the hall she finds Stephen apparently loitering idly in it.

"Oh, Brailsford," cries she, "mamma says you are off to a book-sale in Paris. Will you do me a little favour? Will you get me a new French novel; two if you can?"

Stephen gazes on his happy sister, and answers somewhat vaguely, "Yes, if I have time."

The girl and her *fiancé* pass out of the hall door. Lord Brailsford stands a moment or two painfully

regarding them. Then, with a sigh, he turns away, and slowly, sadly approaches the door of his father's apartment—an apartment, or rather an office, into which he seldom ventured to intrude unbidden. Lord Bedingfield unfortunately made a great distinction between his two children. He loved Georgie intensely; for Stephen he felt but a faint affection. His daughter might take any liberty unrebuked; to his son he often dealt out a harsh word, and never gave more than a civil greeting.

The small room into which Stephen's pressing difficulties precipitate him is in fact an office where Lord Bedingfield transacts a vast deal of business, which to most men occupying so dignified a position would have been irksome and uncongenial to the last degree. And we believe that the Earl himself felt conscious that the rustic pursuits to which he devoted his whole existence were beneath him. He had a certain degree of sensitiveness on this point, and he neither expected nor desired a visit from any of his own family, or from any of his guests or equals in this agricultural closet. Little sample bags of wheat or other grain, may, at any time, be found lying on the table, or a grazier's letter, or a veterinary surgeon's. A file with bills on it is always visible, and the whole walls of the small apartment are covered with portraits of his favourite and famous horses, or his still more famous kine.

There is, however, but one picture in his Lordship's closet of value. It is placed over the mantelpiece, and is the production of the greatest animal painter of the day. It represents Solomon, the king of the herd, in all his

glory. Yes, there stands in proud and regal beauty the thousand-guinea bull, of which Lucy professes to be jealous.

But Lord Brailsford must not be kept longer at the door by perhaps tiresome description. He turns the handle, he enters the room, he approaches his father, who is writing.

"Well, Brailsford," says the great agriculturist, suspending his writing operations and looking on the young Lord with scarce suppressed surprise and annoyance, "your visit to me *here* means business, I suppose?"

"I am very sorry to trouble you, sir," murmurs Stephen, his green eyes happily cast down, "but I really have come to ask you for something."

"Money," cries his Lordship, "of course."

"Well, yes, indeed," answers Stephen nervously. "Mamma, you know, usually supplies my wants, but she declares she has not a sou left. This miserable revelry or merry-making on my account has cleaned her regularly out, and she says the money you give her monthly is not due for six days."

"Won-der-ful!" cries Lord Bedingfield, laughing and leaning back in his chair; "won-der-ful that Lucy should re-mem-ber when her money is due."

"My mother asked me to wait till then, but, sir, I cannot. I have, perhaps thoughtlessly, promised to be on the other side the Channel before."

"And pray," says the Earl, "may I take leave to inquire what bu-si-ness so sud-den-ly carries you from Otteley?"

"A mere literary transaction," answers Stephen, avoiding his father's gaze and blushing like a girl, "a sale of rare old books. I have a particular desire to get hold of one of them."

"When you first showed yourself, Stephen," remarked his Lordship in a less acrid tone of voice, "when you first came in, I tell you can-did-ly I had a dif-fer-ent im-pres-sion of the bu-si-ness that brought you here. I thought you had looked in upon me *here*, where we were sure to be un-mo-les-ted, to give me a hint or a re-min-der that it was time I made you a suitable al-low-ance. I am not forgetful, Brailsford, but 'tis an awkward time. Georgie's en-gage-ment; I suppose these young lovers won't want to wait. I shall have to bring out something con-sid-er-able for the marriage. It's, you see, an awkward time."

"Oh, I assure you," cries Stephen, "I never thought of such a thing. I never contemplated any change. I have very little care for money, except now and then. And this evening, if you will be so kind, sir, if you can let me have sufficient for my purpose."

"What is it to be?" asks his Lordship, bringing out his cheque-book from the old-fashioned bureau before which he sat.

"You will think me very troublesome," murmurs Stephen, "but I would rather not have a cheque. I am such a fool about business, I do not understand cheques."

"Time you did then, my good fellow."

"I dare say, but I never was in a bank. I never saw a banker in my life. Can you, sir, give me gold or notes?"

"Do you think then, Stephen, that I keep bushels of gold and rolls of notes at Otteley? Let me see" (pulling out a yellow canvas bag), "I have not here" (as he counts) "more than five-and-twenty sovereigns. Three ten-pound notes, I remember, are in my pocket-book that's in my greatcoat pocket, there, there on the chair by the fire. There, just hand the coat to me. There" (taking out the notes), "that'll be fifty-five."

"Yes, sir."

"That won't do, I should say. These old books are d— ex-pen-sive. It isn't enough."

"I dare say, yes, I suppose," answers Stephen sadly.

"Don't say yes and mean no. Dixon has thirty sovereigns, I know. I gave them to him to pay the men. Go tell him I desire you to have them."

"No," answers Stephen in a voice that was strange and sad, "no, I shall do as I am. Say one kind word," he added, holding out his hand, "and presently I shall be off."

"What! without your dinner?"

"Yes," says Stephen, once more holding out his delicate, womanish hand, which was clasped in his father's, once as small, but now swollen and red.

"Brailsford," cries Lord Bedingfield, gazing upon his son's wan, nay, almost deathlike countenance, "you're a strange fellow. I can't conceive how any rational being can be in such a devil of a hurry about an old book. There's nothing wrong in the wind, eh?"

Stephen answered, "Wrong! how can there be?" He had reached the door.

"Take my word for't, Steevy," cries his father in a

kindlier tone than usual, "you'd better stay where you are, and leave the d— book alone.

'Tis breakfast time at Otteley. Lord Bedingfield, although of late grown so corpulent, is still a very early riser. It is his custom every day to mount his favourite horse, and make a tour of inspection before breakfast. So often it happens that Lucy has opened and read her own letters before her husband appears. This morning old Marston, who chose to make it his business to open the letter-bag and bear its contents to the breakfast-room, this morning old Marston conveys on a little silver waiter to his mistress one single letter. One single letter, but worth to her how many dozens of other letters, for it is in the handwriting of Desmond de St. Brie. How throbs the woman's heart as she tears it open! The unquenched flame of passion rises once more in her bosom. She can only expect that the priest renews his daring, his sinful proposal. Scarce, however, has she read a line when the colour fades from her cheek. Her eyes, her sweet blue eyes, are opened wider than usual, and amazement is printed on every feature. Thus looked the Countess when her Lord, having returned from his tour of inspection, enters the room.

"Oh, Everard!" she exclaims or rather groans as the Earl draws to the table. He looks up, he sees his Lucy breaking into a passion of tears.

"What is the matter?" he asks in more than surprise.

"Read, read, read for yourself," cries the ever

thoughtless Lucy, casting de St. Brie's letter down before her husband.

"*This* fellow writing! the priest! and ad-dress-ing you as his dearest Lucy. Why do you give me the letter, Madam?"

"Why do I give you the letter?" cries she wildly; "to read. Why do you not read it? O my poor love, my hope!"

"Madam, are you insane? Do you dare use such ex-pres-sions in con-nec-tion with Desmond de St. Brie?"

"It is not about Desmond I am speaking," cries Lucy, "it is about my poor Stephen. That horrid young Dau-bigny has quarrelled with him, has almost killed him.

Hereupon Lord Bedingfield, with a trembling hand, takes the obnoxious letter up again (much as if it had been an adder) and reads.

"Had you any con-sci-ous-ness of the reason Brails-ford left home?" he asks. "I re-mem-ber being struck by his manner."

"Consciousness!" exclaims Lucy, "good heavens, no! I should assuredly have told you had I dreamt of his purpose."

"How could the poor crazy lad have got himself into such a devil of a mess? And then, of all people in the world, to seek as-sist-ance from that man. What could have led Stephen to expect sym-pa-thy in him? Perhaps, Madam, you can suggest some reason?"

"None in the world," cries Lucy. "Stephen certainly asked me if my cousin still remained where he was, and I answered yes. But what was there in such a question?"

"And pray, Madam, may I take leave to inquire how you knew where St. Brie ex-er-cised his priest-craft? It is more than two whole years, as far as I know, since you have met. Such knowledge, Madam, revives my sus-pi-cion. Coming to Dover with the poor wounded fool. 'If we find no letter a-wait-ing us at 'The Ship' to stay our progress, we shall continue the journey on to Otteley.' Am-az-ing-ly cool; in-toler-able in-so-lence. I will have none of his inter-fer-ence. By God, Madam, I will write myself and inform your cousin that *he* may stay at 'The Ship,' but that I will provide a nurse and a doctor and a carriage for the wretched lad who—"

"Write," cries Lucy, weeping (it was well she did not rouge before breakfast), "write," cries Lucy, "yes, every word you have uttered, and I myself will be the bearer of your letter. Yes, since Desmond, after all his tenderness to my son, may not enter your doors, I myself will go and fetch Stephen and acknowledge. . . ."

"Go, Madam, if you will. But pray, return not here. Let our separ-a-tion, in God's name, be per-ma-nent."

"I thank you, my Lord," cries Lucy, drying her tears, and standing proud, erect, disdainful. You have now yourself broken all that held us together. I will not be slow to avail myself of your permission."

And Lucy is gone. In her fierce anger, awakened by her husband's ingratitude to Desmond, his evident suspicion of herself, she loses sight of all prudence. She rings for Celine, bids her pack up her clothes. She orders the carriage, then remembering poor

Stephen's deplorable condition, she suddenly stays Celine in her packing and bids her fetch in the head coachman. With him she has a brief discourse. She tells him of his young master's accident, that she is going to Dover to meet the invalid, that she must, for his accommodation, have the family travelling carriage and four post-horses.

Scarcely, however, had Lucy left the breakfast-room, when the Lady Georgina enters it. She has come down late. Willie's leave expires to-day; he had been compelled to quit Otteley late last night. No lover to greet the girl at breakfast-time, she had not cared to hasten over her morning toilet.

The Earl, on finding his daughter in the room, reads to her a portion of De St. Brie's letter, adding, as he finishes reading, that to himself the whole affair is inexplicable. No part of it more "in-volv-ed in mystery" than how a quarrel could have arisen between Daubigny and Stephen.

"Oh, papa!" cries Georgie, after bewailing her brother's misfortune, "oh, papa, though you are so entirely in the dark, I fancy I can let in a little light. You remember, don't yqu, the promised token, how I offended Stephen? and I have never forgotten the initials, H. G. G. D."

"But what has that to do with young Daubigny?"

"I fancy a great deal. Sir Ruthyn Pell knows a young fellow whose sisters witnessed a very singular, a very suspicious scene once at the play between young Daubigny and H. G. G. D. Depend upon it, papa, it's our mysterious, little, gipsy-like neighbour

who's at the bottom of the mischief. You never notice these things; but even Willie, little disposed as he is to criticise, thinks she's turned Stephen's brain."

"My dear girl," murmurs Lord Bedingfield, "pray be cautious. You do not know what trouble and perplexity the in-con-sider-ate whispers of tale-bearers bring about."

"Oh! I shan't speak of it if I can help myself," cries Georgie. "But where's mamma?"

"You may well ask," cries the Earl. "Georgie, I'm sorry to say your mother has been quar-rel-ling with me, or rather, perhaps, I ought to say, I have griev-ous-ly of-fend-ed her. She insists on going off to Dover to meet the crazy lad and—and the priest."

"Well, and why should you object, papa?"

Lord Bedingfield shrugs his shoulders, but answers nothing.

"Surely," continues Georgie, "at such a time you did not say anything unkind to mamma?"

"Hasty," mutters his Lordship, "just go, my love, and see what she's about,—whether she really does intend, contrary to all reason . . ."

Georgie waited not to hear the finish of the sentence. Like an arrow from a bow the girl darted off to find her mother, not in the connubial chamber where first she ran, but in that pretty Frenchified apartment which but so lately the Countess had vacated.

Lucy has sunk into a chair before her toilet-table. One hand is supporting her head. She is weeping. She is agitated to the last degree.

"Oh, mamma," cries Georgie, "I am indeed so

grieved for poor Stephen ! Papa says you are going to meet him."

"And what else has my Lord said?" asked Lucy. "Has he told you why? Has he told you that he threatens to write to my cousin Desmond and order him not to intrude here?"

"No, indeed!"

"And this is the reason we have quarrelled, Georgie" (with a fresh burst of tears), "your father has ordered me to keep away altogether."

"Nonsense," cries Georgie, unenlightened as to the depth of Lord Bedingfield's jealousy.

"It is indeed so."

Georgie hereupon flies back to her father. "Papa," cries the girl in fear and trembling, "mamma is getting ready to start. She says that you have desired her to stay away altogether. What can have happened? Oh, papa, how sad! You do not know how happy it made me to see you both—" The girl wept herself so she could not speak.

"I am the most d—d un-for-tunate man God ever created," broke in half-suffocated tones from the noble Earl, from him who owned the finest estate and the loveliest of wives in all the county.

"You had better go to mamma at once," cries Georgie, "and see for yourself how wretched your thoughtless words have made her."

Hereupon the corpulent little man arises, and takes some uneasy strides about the room, his head held as high as ever it will go, absolutely bringing the little dimpled chin clean out of the roll of white neckcloth.

Georgie watches her father in great apprehension. She had never before seen him disturbed and indignant as he is now. The connubial combats had hitherto been conducted with discretion. The girl knows the power she herself possesses over him, and in another moment her arms are around the roll of white neck-cloth, and kissing the forehead knitted into a frown, she asks if he intends to blast the happiness he had but so lately led her to expect, and which she but yesterday thought so secure.

"For indeed," she murmurs, "if mamma and you really quarrel, I can have no happiness with Willie; and oh, dearest papa, what a scene for him when next he comes! You here alone, mamma gone!"

"Child," cries the Earl, "I do not con-tem-plate such a future. Do you think I should make an ex-hi-bition of myself under such cir-cum-stances? Dam-nation—death—an-ni-hi-la-tion rather. Where is she?"

"I found mamma in the French room where she used to sleep."

"What! already flown?" cries he, and this first step towards a "permanent separation" sends a goad to his heart, and gives unwonted activity to his Lordship's top-booted legs, his yet spurred heels. In haste he seeks his wife in the pretty apartment where but so lately they had made up their old quarrel. On entering it, he finds Mademoiselle Celine on her knees packing. He detests the French maid; he bids her leave the packing for the present and "go." His Lordship will have no delay; he holds the door open with one hand, with the other makes an impatient gesture for the

woman's departure. Celine having disappeared, the Earl, scarcely knowing himself how best to proceed to recapture the fierce little dove whose cage-door unwittingly he had opened, in no little trepidation approaches the toilet-table before which his Lucy still sits. "Lucy," he murmurs, "Lucy;" but Lucy answers nothing, while the big tears roll anew down her yet unrouged cheeks. He ventures nearer. "Lucy, do you hear me? I protest against this un-neces-sary, this im-pru-dent step you are about to take. When have you ever tra-vel-led alone un-protect-ed? You must not go to Dover."

"Did you not bid me go and stay away?" cries Lucy, weeping like a very child.

"Bid you go, love? God of Heaven, no! 'Twas you said you *would* go; and then, hastily, indeed, I answered that in such a case you had best stay away."

"For ever!" cries she; "and why did I say I would go?"

"I confess, my dear, that I showed some temper, that I spoke has-ti-ly, perhaps un-ad-vised-ly. Yes, your cousin Desmond has shown ap-pa-rent-ly a perfect dis-in-ter-ested-ness in this affair, and he shall, as you desire, receive a due measure of courtesy at my hands. Lucy, of the two evils I will en-dea-vour pa-tient-ly to endure the least. When an af-flic-tion is hanging over us, the ter-mi-nation of which none may foresee, I think, my dear, under such sad cir-cum-stances, I need not fear. Would you, who love your son so pas-sion-ate-ly, would you dare by any act of le-vi-ty to make the cloud denser wherein the Al-migh-ty has at this present moment as it were veiled himself from us?"

Lucy did love her son passionately. Her heart was touched by her husband's forbearance and tenderness. Conscience told her that the cloud betwixt herself and the Almighty was already dense enough, and when Lord Bedingfield continued his discourse, showing his readiness immediately to send a carriage and servants to meet his son on landing at Dover, and added that he would not object to receive the priest, the little dove suffered herself once more to be coaxed back into the connubial cage.

CHAPTER LXXI.

HAS it ever been your fate, my reader, to have been sojourning in a dwelling-house, when fell a day, marked, remembered by the inmates of that house as one of the saddest and most memorable in life's calendar, by reason that on that day was held in that house a consultation of surgeons over a difficult, a dangerous case, concerning one beloved?

If such accidentally has been my reader's experience, no need for me to dwell on the heart-sick anxiety of those how deeply interested, for at Otteley to-day is in progress such a grave affair.

Two pure surgeons of the highest repute have travelled down from London to be received at the abbey by Dr. Softly, by a French surgeon who crossed with, who has attended Lord Brailsford from the first moment of his misfortune, and by Desmond de St. Brie, who still lingers by the sick man's couch. The business, the errand upon which these two first-class surgeons have arrived, is to make a minute examination of the wound inflicted, according to the law of duels, by Captain Daubigny on Stephen Leigh, Lord Brailsford, and after due investigation of the said wound, it will be their further business to determine when and in what

manner the inevitable operation shall be by them performed upon the wounded limb ; a portion of a shivered bone and a bullet yet remaining imbedded in the flesh, have each to be removed or the worst consequences may ensue. To the uninitiated it may seem strange, nay, almost incredible, that Lord Brailsford should have attempted to, should have desired to, cross the Channel in the wretched state to which his antagonist's fire had reduced him. But Stephen Leigh was inherently, incurably romantic or unreasonable. He himself had no expectation of recovery ; he counted only on death, and he desired to die at Otteley. No persuasion of the priest, no opinion delivered by the French surgeon could make the slightest impression. His heart was set upon returning home, and home he would go at any risk. And so indifferent apparently had he been to life, or so lethargic as to threatening danger, that not until he had been several days at Otteley could any one induce him to have sent for, the two famous surgeons whose handling, whose tender mercies were so imperatively required.

We have said that as long as Dr. Softly had remained a resident in London, his practice had been extensive, particularly amongst women. Did we add amongst women moving in the highest circles ? In his long experience he had been led to believe that the mind, the heart, the passions there engendered are frequently the origin of female indisposition. Acting on this belief, he had got into a way of observing, of scrutinising the countenances of his patients. In fact, by long study he had acquired a disagreeable facility, an almost

dangerous power of reading the human heart by external signs. And to his sagacity we suspect might be mainly attributable Lord Brailsford's amended condition of mind.

It was found after one of Dr. Softly's professional visits, that Stephen no longer objected to the London surgeons being sent for. The priest announced to Lucy the hopeful change. Stephen had told him that the surgeons might come, that he consented to submit to the required examination.

Now, let us see whether we can trace out how this change of feeling has arisen in the young Lord; let us see if it has not been the mysterious work of our gentle gliding doctor. Has he not managed by some necromancy to pour balm into his patient's wounded heart? And the heart cheated, flattered, lightened, somewhat lightened of its burden of despair, "the poor lad," as Lord Bedingfield always now designates the wounded man, "the poor lad" listens to reason.

We have somewhere before mentioned that Sir Charles had desired Dr. Softly to pay a professional visit daily at Brierly. Of course in these visits the doctor had spoken to Helene of the wretched condition in which Lord Brailsford lay. On one occasion he had particularly alluded to the deep dejection of mind under which his Otteley patient laboured. The girl's own soul was full of anguish, full of apprehension, though perhaps the deeper sorrow she experienced was for the sinner, who, untouched, unscathed himself, remained yet abroad waiting, as he wrote, "to see how the Otteley affair would end." It matters little, however, to our

story what was the exciting cause, we have only to show that as the doctor concluded his account of poor Stephen's indifference, apathy, and carelessness of threatening danger, Helene wholly lost her self-command and broke into an ungovernable passion of tears. The wily physician, skilled in deciphering the mysteries of the female mind, as intently he watched the girl during this outbreak of nature, read the anxiety, the misery she hitherto had managed to conceal.

On the other hand, in his oft-repeated visits to the abbey, the doctor had more than once observed Lord Brailsford's awakened attention if accidentally the words Brierly or Daubigny were named before him, and therefore by way of experiment he resolved to give his Lordship on his next professional visit a narration of Helene's sympathy and tears.

He had not foreseen the effect of his communication. It surpassed his utmost expectation, and on the instant he made a mental memorandum, determining presently to turn to good account the knowledge he had gained.

Hence when paying next day his customary visit at Brierly, our doctor softly indeed hinted his belief. "Pardon me, Lady Daubigny," whispers he, "but from certain observations I have made, from a little scene I yesterday witnessed, I must say that I believe you have the poor young fellow's destiny in your hands. Can you not afford to bestow some small token of your interest, some words of compassion, of encouragement? Bid him take heart and live. We hold out but one hope; bid him submit to our dictation." Helene listened in surprise, in silence, in dismay. She answered

nothing, and the doctor continued his discourse. "My theory," pursues he, "is that the mind is the governing principle, its power is infinite, supreme. Experience has taught me that depression of mind is the worst enemy we medical men have to fight against. I am called in to attend Lord Brailsford; I find him so depressed as to be utterly careless of the means of resuscitating life. I place myself by the sofa on which he reclines, I converse on various subjects; I can make no impression, I create no interest until I happen to mention that I am in daily attendance at Brierly. His weakness for the moment is gone, he raises himself up, he asks who is my patient. I pronounce your name. The colour comes to his cheek, his eye brightens. He is ready to speak, he listens with eager attention. Lady Daubigny, am I not right; if my theory be a correct one, am I not right? A message, a few words of tenderness, even a few flowers."

Helene felt perplexed, disturbed, nay, even distressed. She knew not what to do; she dreaded getting into a new dilemma.

"Lady Daubigny," whispers the doctor as he sat watching the girl, and read in her troubled countenance the disturbance of her mind, "Lady Daubigny, you may trust to my discretion. Whatever confidence you may be pleased to repose in me shall be a secret to the day of my death."

"There is nothing whatever," answers Helene a little haughtily; "there never has been, I assure you, Dr. Softly, between Lord Brailsford and myself, but regard, friendship."

"On your part," whispers the doctor impressively, gazing as he spoke searchingly on the girl; "but—" he paused.

Helene coloured, but steadily she answered, "Indeed you are mistaken if you fancy I am conscious that Lord Brailsford has feelings for me of a nature to be a secret, and if he had, he would not presume . . ."

"Pardon me," cries the doctor, "pardon me, Lady Daubigny, but the intense agitation I witnessed, the interest he manifests, causes me to be unshaken in my belief. You have a power over his Lordship none other has. Beg of him to use the means we prescribe. Tell him his life is precious to you. That is all I suggest."

"And how can I do it?" cries Helene, rising from her seat with a sigh of perturbation.

"Nothing easier. Send him by my hand a little bouquet of flowers. Let the paper folded round the nosegay contain a few words of kindness. Say that you beg, you entreat he will listen to reason."

"Oh! Dr. Softly," cries Helene, unable to resist a little laugh, "I see you are an arch contriver."

"My dear Lady," says the doctor, smiling and bowing with a courtly air, "in my former years of practice I have indeed been occasionally, I confess, a contriver, but always with a view to a good end."

"Remember," says Helene, still perturbed, "if I am doing a wrong thing, my error will be attributable to yourself."

"Indeed," murmurs the doctor, "indeed, Lady Daubigny, I am perfectly sensible that such is the case, and quite ready to bear the blame."

"Well, then," cries the girl, rising and moving towards her *escritoire*, "well, then, I am going to write, and then, when I have written, you must go with me to the conservatory to get some flowers."

And Helene, with trouble printed on her young brow, writes—

"My soul is overwhelmed with apprehension, by reason of the news I daily hear of thine indifference to life, and thy disregard of the doctor's counsel. Dost thou desire to crush me quite ?

"Wilt thou die to make this world for me more dreadful than the darkness, the horror of the grave to which thou thyself art hastening ? Once more, I sue to thee for pity. But ah ! when thou hast been inexorable to my former prayer, why should I hope now to influence thee to be reasonable ?

"May dreams be accepted as omens ? Listen then. But last night I dreamt of thee, a sweet, a strange fantastic dream. It seemed not of the present ; it seemed to be of the future. Thyself, as I have always known thee, yet thyself, invested with angelic holiness and beauty, wandered beside me amid the waving summer grass, the wild sweet woodland flowers ; the tall boughs formed an arch above us, shading the brightness of the noontide sun.

"I send my little note folded round some flowers ; for aught I know, thou mayest cast both my offerings away in contempt, in disdain."

The girl had written the very truth. She had indeed but the night before dreamt the very dream she described. She did not care to show to her companion

that which she had written ; but as she rose from the escritoire, invited him to proceed with her to the conservatory.

There culling some sprays of white Indian jessamine and some lovely exotic lilies, she folds the written paper round their stalks, then suddenly, childlike, she exclaims, "But how will he know that there is any writing on the paper?"

"Trust me for that," answers the doctor with another stately bow, as from Helene's little gipsy hand he receives the flowers.

Dr. Softly's close carriage awaits him at the Brierly hall door. In a few minutes he has stepped into it, and is on his way to the abbey. We need scarcely say that, as he is driven slowly along—for he has ordered his coachman to drive slowly—we need scarcely say that thus, in the privacy of his small chariot, he takes the liberty of unfolding the written paper Helene had twisted round the flower-stalks. The paper is unfolded ; the words are before him ; he even puts on his gold spectacles, but it is all to very little purpose. Sagacious as he is, crafty as he is, he cannot decipher the meaning of Lady Daubigny's words. The little note is a perfect enigma to him. Never had his curiosity been more excited, never had it been so completely baffled.

On arriving at Otteley, as he comes professionally, Dr. Softly may reach Lord Brailsford's apartment without question or interruption, if it pleases him so to do ; and to-day he glides in, he approaches the couch on which the sick man lies without encountering any one

but "the poor lad's" valet. After noiselessly depositing his hat and his gold-headed cane on one chair, he seats himself on the next; his fingers are presently on the sufferer's pulse. Now is his time. He tells his patient that he has just left Brierly; that Lady Daubigny feels the most intense sympathy; that by his hands she sends some flowers; that in the wrapper around the flowers he saw her write some expressions of her deep concern. What a start! what a flutter of the pulse does the doctor's communication occasion! He could keep his fingers no longer on his Lordship's wrist; but he could perhaps do more for the gratification of his curiosity by using his eyes. The flowers had been deposited in the crown of the doctor's hat; he reaches them, he gives them to his patient, and then, with that winning delicacy, that priceless consideration which seemed a part of his nature, the doctor takes up a book and pretends to be intently examining it. Was he examining the book? Ah, no! While the hapless Stephen himself was so intent on reading Helene's words, while he was so agitated by them that his hand trembled as he held the written paper, Dr. Softly was craftily glancing. Could the sinister old man be mistaken? No. The flushed cheek, the trembling hand, the excited eye, told, despite of Helene's contradictory words, that she had in her hands the destiny of the wounded Viscount.

CHAPTER LXXII.

IF that day is sad when the surgeons pay their first visit, how much more sad is that on which they pay their second, their pre-arranged visit—when that is actually to be done which previously had been but contemplated. As the Countess hears the sound of the carriage-wheels, as she hears the tramp of the horses, as she hears each sound suddenly cease, and knows that the surgeons have arrived, she becomes so oppressed with dread that she has no power to speak, and her very lips are pale. It is an ill wind that blows no one any good; and Lord Brailsford's danger has worked marvels on our Lucy. That pale cheek has carried no rouge for days and days. The practised hand at the soul's bidding refuses to do its office—is arrested by what some would call superstitious fear. The lover of Lady Bedingfield's girlhood is dwelling in the same house with herself, but apprehension chases from her soul its impassioned sin, and the lips that for years have scarce uttered a heart-felt prayer, supplicate now for undeserved mercy in every interval of retirement, in the wakeful hours of the night.

Lord Bedingfield, the Countess, and the Lady Georgina are gathered together in the morning-room, in order

there to see the two surgeons before they go up-stairs to their cruel work. They had not been introduced to the young Lord's noble relatives on their first visit; the priest and Dr. Softly had met them then. But little as Lord Bedingfield loves Stephen, yet to-day, when so grave an affair is to be enacted, and under his own roof, he feels it to be his duty to see the surgeons, and with his own hand conveys to theirs the enormous fee they ask for coming to Otteley.

The Earl has bidden old Marston be in the way ready to introduce these two famous operators; and now the old man, with a trembling hand, opens the morning-room door. Ah! how the mere turning of the door handle, the opening of the door, sickens poor Lucy's heart, and makes even the stronger-minded Georgie shudder.

But here they are.

Sir Maxwell Murchieson, who enters first, is the surgeon in highest repute; he is the great operator of the day.

In figure Sir Maxwell is gaunt and tall, his countenance certainly forbidding. He has a nose like an eagle's beak, a skin hard-looking, dry, and brown, his forehead is lofty and well-shaped, his cheek-bones high and prominent. He is spare of his words, cautious in giving an opinion, rather awkward in manner. A certain something about him, it may be in his manner of speaking, betrays his Scottish origin. Sir Maxwell's friend and companion, Mr. Home-Tracy, is a great contrast. Small and delicate in form, kindly in manner, with a hand soft and white as a woman's, a voice all harmony, an almost inconsiderate readiness in using

it, who that saw Mr. Home-Tracy could suppose such a man enamoured of a pure surgeon's practice? His present business appears to be to supply words—to act as a kind of interpreter to his stiffer and more ungainly friend.

"Your son, my Lord," says Mr. Home-Tracy, a gentle smile playing on his lips as he speaks, "your son has with difficulty, I understand, been induced to submit himself to our hands. 'Tis his misfortune to have delayed using the means of recovery so long. Of course delay has aggravated the symptoms. The operation we contemplate is, in Sir Maxwell's opinion, the only remedy, save that graver one we resort to only in the last extremity."

"A dan-ger-ous case?" asks Lord Bedingfield, drawing his chin a little out of his white neckcloth and turning his eyes from the loquacious to the taciturn surgeon.

Sir Maxwell shrugs his shoulders and smiles grimly. "An ugly wound, my Lord, a bad fracture. With your leave, my Lord, I reserve my answer until I see further."

"You see, my Lord," puts in the bland, smiling Home-Tracy, "this grievous delay has rendered the case more serious."

"Will the op-er-a-tion you have induced Brailsford to consent to, will it occasion the poor lad very considerable suffering?" continues Lord Bedingfield, still addressing Sir Maxwell Murchieson.

"Very considerable, I should say," answers Sir Maxwell, unmoved himself as a block.

"Will the op-er-a-tion occupy much time?" pursues

the Earl, his eyes still turned upon the ungainly Scotchman.

"Cannot say, my Lord. I should hope not," replies Sir Maxwell, and there is in his tone of voice almost a forbidding chilliness, while his lips are so tightly closed they seem determined not again to open.

"We count, my Lord, by minutes, by seconds," says the softly-spoken Tracy by way of elucidation. "My friend here is held to be a marvel of coolness, courage, and despatch."

Sir Maxwell is by no means insensible to praise. He bows his gaunt figure, he once more opens his tight-set lips, and says, awkwardly enough, "I trust in this case I may not belie the reputation my friend ascribes." Here the great man pauses, pulls out his watch. "Tracy," he says, "suspense is bad. My Lord, we shall be expected; we must not linger."

Hereupon Lord Bedingfield shakes hands with the two famous surgeons, conveying to them at the same time the fee demanded.

Because I have not yet mentioned it, let not my reader suppose that the duel between Captain Daubigny and Lord Brailsford has created no sensation. There have been, and there still are paragraphs in the papers affecting to throw light on the subject.

Coming so immediately after the great rejoicing and gaiety at Otteley, taking place between two people who apparently should have no cause of quarrel, the warlike encounter wears an unusual air of mystery. Especially piquant is the affair to the inquisitive and

the gossip-loving, for the reason that each of the belligerents continues to maintain a resolute silence as to the source, the origin of his disagreement.

Then the rank, the position of the parties concerned ; the one heir to an earldom, the other heir-presumptive to a time-worn baronetcy. Does not this accidental distinction (for the many) cast a halo of light or rather a tinsel glory around the brows of the two fiery youths concerned ?

Then, again, what perhaps adds further to the interest excited, is the wide difference in the characters of the combatants.

Lord Brailsford hitherto living almost in seclusion, always in delicate health, by nature refined, sensitive, somewhat fastidious, and devoted to literary pursuits.

Captain Daubigny, a wild, careless spendthrift, addicted to the turf, a proficient in "manly sport," whose last year's marriage has not wrought the reformation sanguine friends had hoped it would.

That division of the county in which Otteley lies is all astir with the news, that is to say, the aristocratic portion of its inhabitants and the agricultural. The peasant and the shopkeeper are seldom moved by such matters. But in this case the farmers are not a whit less interested than are their landlords. No doubt, on account of Lord Bedingfield's peculiar character, the farmers generally honour and respect our little plethoric Earl ; nay, they have almost a tender regard for their agricultural Lord-Lieutenant. He has invariably shown himself so thoughtful and so condescending to these his rural neighbours ; he has been so honest, so upright in

all his dealings with them; and Stephen, who lies at Otteley in a doubtful or a dangerous state, Stephen should be Lord Bedingfield's successor.

Then for Captain Daubigny. Though he comes no more to Brierly now, yet these rustic men have met him often when a boy, and often since. They have met him in the hunting-field, they have met him on the cricket-ground. He has played at cricket with them or with their sons, and many a tale could they tell of young Daubigny's unscrupulous conduct and crafty manœuvres during his former frequent sojourns at Brierly. Even in sport, the nephew of the delicate-minded, sensitive Charles Daubigny, even in sport the boy had descended to the very lowest. One of our farming friends could name the different places where he ran his young cocks, who it was that trained and trimmed the poor birds for battle, where the fights took place, what money the lad had lost.

Then Tresham was given to boxing, and Birken of Brackley Mill (a jolly old miller he was) relates how, more than once, in the absence of Sir Charles, the hopeful heir-expectant had brought to Brierly, and kept him there for days, a certain man famous in the ring. And once, once he had actually attempted to pass another of his pugilistic friends off on poor Sir Charles as a gentleman, and his uncle, detecting the fraud, had, "as old butler there ha' told me, been indignant beyond measure."

Although for many days after Lord Brailsford had submitted himself to the tender handling of those two

famous surgeons, it seemed to poor humanity as a doubtful case whether this day or next would be his Lordship's last on earth; yet the angel of death descended not to clasp him in its chill embrace.

By the world 'twas said that the genius, the skill of Sir Maxwell Murchieson had saved the young Lord's life. We, however, suggest the possible interposition of a far mightier power. In one of his many sermons Donne remarks, that "when our Saviour was on earth, He manifested a peculiar tenderness towards women. Never once did He turn from, never once was He obdurate to, the prayer of a repentant or a believing woman."

Hence, possibly to Lucy's ceaseless prayers, Stephen owed his life. Contrite and broken-hearted, the Countess knelt before her Saviour and her God, imploring from Him the life of her son. Nay, the impassioned pleading of the fond mother went yet further. She solemnly vowed that if her prayer were granted, she herself, in token of her gratitude, would live a new, a holier life. To quote once more from our favourite divine: "God," says he, "hath divers ways into divers men; into some He comes at noon, in the sunshine of prosperity, to some in the dark and heavy clouds of adversity." And it was now, when the darkness and horror of death hung over her son, her only son, that Lucy's conscience, so long slumbering, first awakens. Stephen was naturally inclined to good; he had done as little evil in his young life as he could well have done. His first extravagant breach of rectitude had been in casting his eyes in too great admiration upon another man's

wife. But he had intended to love only in secrecy, in sadness. He had intended to bury his sinful passion in his own bosom, that bosom should be its grave, that grave should admit no other tenant. His would be a lifelong sorrow, but a cherished grief, one that he would never seek to cure. His second great sin—if sin it could be called, for he scarcely had a choice in the matter—was the acceptance of Daubigny's challenge; and now that Stephen lies, as Lucy thinks, wounded to the death, dying of that second act of ungoverned passion, her awakened conscience upbraids her bitterly in regard of him. From his very childhood she knew that she had sought rather to blunt his natural sense of rectitude than to encourage its growth. Before him, and known to him, she had practised a thousand little deceits on her straightforward, simple-minded husband. The boy, even when a mere child, had disapproved of his mother's falsehoods and subtleties, and with a sweet and holy innocence, which arose now how sadly to her memory, had whispered to her of her duplicity. But he loved her so that his childish kisses had mingled with his half-playful reproaches. By every day's example, by laughing at his scruples, she had perhaps somewhat quenched his native sensitiveness to right, his love of truth. Had he been of a sinful nature, he might have sinned a hundredfold more than he had done without remonstrance from herself. For any teaching he had ever had from her, he might have been a very Pagan. Never once in her life had she breathed a word to him of a God, never had she read a line to him of holy writ.

And there was no one now to whisper to him of that

dread journey he was about to take, of that other world to which he seemed fast hastening. She knew not how herself to speak to him on such a subject: the pompous aristocrat the rector, the Reverend Sir Mounteney Skeffington, she knew poor Stephen despised for his worldliness, and had always laughed at as a burlesque on a parson; and the priest dare not whisper of his Romish religion, and dare not belie his assumed character by offering up those Protestant prayers that yet lived in his own bosom, that still dwelt in his inmost soul.

So in that old abbey, where, in times long past, the voice of holy song with dawning light day by day had resounded, where continually had been offered up Christian praise and prayer, Stephen, in these days of modern improvement, Stephen, with an intellect cultivated in the highest degree, lay a-dying, just as before Christ trode this weary world, an enlightened Pagan Greek or Roman might have lain.

Ah! to the Countess's suddenly awakened conscience 'twas a cruel thought. No wonder that with such impassioned prayer she sued for years to be added to her Stephen's life.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

BEFORE Lucy, at the command of her parents, had broken off her engagement with Desmond de St. Brie, he had given fairest promise. But the blast of disappointment, the sting of despair had been to him as the tempest that wrenches a vessel from its moorings to drive the half-wrecked craft over an untried ocean track. Without a purpose, without a hope, St. Brie had left his family, his home, and almost by accident had become a Catholic, a priest, one of that order most mistrusted. Yet, even after more than twenty years of trial, his heart still retained its fidelity to his lost mistress, his soul much of its original rectitude. Too late had he discovered his mistake: he had no fellowship by nature with the guileful spirits of those with whom he mingled, no taste for their subtle policy. But he had found distraction from sorrow, some alleviation of his misery, in the work his position imposed upon him.

We have attempted to portray De St. Brie once, when under the influence of severest temptation. We have shown that in that hour of infatuation he had cast away the attributes of his sacred character, of his priestly vocation. As by a miracle, however, he had

been delivered from that particular temptation. The brilliantly-coloured picture on which he had been bidden to gaze had become now but as an indistinct, a faint-hued mezzotint.

Fortune had almost laid her treasures at his feet; in mockery had snatched her purposed offering away.

By the treatment of an eminent London physician St. Brie's consumptive cousin had so far recovered as to be enabled to undertake a voyage to Madeira; and should he reach that isle of beauty as well as when he had left his native land, he might still continue to improve, and remain in existence for months or for years to come.

Such was the state of affairs with Desmond de St. Brie when, Stephen pronounced out of danger, he feels he has no longer a pretext for prolonging his stay at Otteley.

If our isolated, our martyred priest had continued to love his lost Lucy through all her years of folly, if he had continued captive to her fascination when she had been but frivolously bent on amusement, how much more had he loved her during the last few weeks, when together they had bent o'er Stephen's suffering form, when together they had sought to minister to his comfort! How far more lovely to the right-minded St. Brie was Lucy's pale cheek and her almost pale and quivering lip than when the one had worn the colour of a rose-leaf, the other that of rosy coral! Oh! to his native sense of right how sweet to see the Countess thus recalled in mind and soul to the Lucy he had loved in her girlhood.

He held her grief, her return to duty in such sanctity, that at no moment during his sojourn at Otteley did he forget, did he cast aside the self-denial, the reserve befitting his sacred character; and to her surprise, and perhaps to her disappointment, he left the abbey without speaking a last farewell in private.

But he had scarce gone—Lucy's eyes were still watching the progress of the carriage that bore him from her sight—when her son's valet delivered into her hands a sealed package directed in St. Brie's well-known characters.

Conscious that the carefully-sealed package must contain some private communication, the Countess blushes like a girl as she receives it from the man, and with rapid steps and beating heart withdraws to cut the string, break the seals. 'Tis done; she reads—

“The agitation of my mind is so great, induced by our approaching separation, that I dare not ask a farewell in private. Thou hast seen me a very Stoic in thy presence; by God's mercy I have not once transgressed. But alone with thee, at such a moment, I could not answer for a perfect discretion. Inadvertently I might forget who and what I am. My soul might forget the years of nothingness, of vacancy, and leap back to the days when thou and happiness wert mine. I leave thee in silence, but I leave thee as a souvenir a small mediæval crucifix, valuable as a work of art, but which, if I may believe in woman, thou wilt value for other reasons. Before this image of my suffering Saviour, for nearly twenty years, day by day, at evening and at morning, have I bowed me down; and whilst thus in

all humility I have knelt before Him who readeth the secrets of every heart, I have laid bare my own, pleading for resignation under that death-blow to hope, to peace, to rest, how and by whom dealt, thou, dearest Lucy, best can answer.

“I consign this sad, this holy offering to thee as a token of my undying love, as a witness of my invariable fidelity. I might use a stronger word than fidelity, but my sweet Lucy cavils at bare truth.

“Oh, though distance shall lie between us, though on earth we meet no more, I fain would dream that, even to that bitter end that awaits us all, I shall be dear to thee. Because thou disapprovest the religion I profess, yet set not light by the offering I make. Our Saviour prescribed no peculiar form of worship. All He asks is the heart, the will, the endeavour to do right.

“Return not, I beseech thee, to the follies, the dissipation of the world. Long will it be ere Stephen recover. Be to him, as slowly he is restored to health, all that which thou hast been to him when together we trembled, when the dark shadow of death seemed threatening.”

And Christmas came, that season of festivity to man, of woe unto the fatted ox whereon at Christmas-time carnivorous mortals love to feed. Otteley sent up to London choicest beasts laden with fat. The Earl, fat as his own fed beasts, proceeded to the show, gloried, delighted, triumphed in the praise awarded to himself for breeding, to the beasts for having such capacity for

fattening. He was in spirits, he was active as his own growth of flesh permitted. Difficult to understand, his utterance often woolly, indistinct; but he was well and tolerably happy.

Lucy was kinder, more considerate to her Lord; she did not mock, make merry at his eccentricities. Lucy had lost much of her former flippant folly, a light had dawned upon her soul. She really tried to do her duty.

And much attention, kindness, thought, poor Stephen yet required. He was a cripple. If he moved without man's aid, he must perforce use crutches. And so he made himself invisible. He could not bear man's criticism when thus reduced to ashes.

This Christmas came no merry guests nor modish guests to Otteley. The Countess somehow could not rally back her spirits. Since Desmond left, leaving his priestly souvenir, she had been almost pensive.

But two there were this Christmas-time who also sojourned at the abbey—two so lost in love's sweet rhapsody they scarce knew how the outer world proceeded. Need we say the one was William Valence d'Abridgecourt, the other Lady Georgina Leigh?

He had got leave to be absent from his regiment for a month, and, instead of his grim colonel, had Cupid for a commander. And what was D'Abridgecourt? Let us try to make him out. By nature he was rather silent, rather matter-of-fact, a little difficult to unravel. He was rather *too* reserved. Strangers thought him cold and proud. But in his soul he was conscientious, in his conduct remarkably consistent. Willie, as he was always called by the family at the abbey, Willie did

not please every one. He never stooped to conquer, or perhaps he might have been patronised by his noble and wealthy kinsman the Marquis.

D'Abridgecourt loved the Lady Georgina for herself, yet he saw her imperfections often; and the girl loved him so, and knew he was so good she bore with his objections. Their days of courtship were serene as sweet. What love was in their very silence! what hope was in their future! They snatched from destiny a present mental ecstasy indescribable in words.

And now we leave the abbey, take our way to Brierly. There, too, this Christmas-time was no festivity, save that coarse measure permitted annually to the servants in the servants'-hall. No lack of out-door bounty, no lack of food, fire, raiment for the poor. Sir Charles was careful none should suffer.

But a dim shadow stalked beside our master; vain, how vain his efforts to be free! How grave the girl had grown! Her rounded cheek had lost its childlike roundness, her eyes had lost their laughing light. May, May, the month she once had longed to welcome; May, with its lilacs, its laburnums, when at noon she had watched the skimming swallows, at eve the shadowy bat; May, the coming May for her was but a ghostly month. How oft she shuddered as she thought of what might be! Silent she was, she uttered no reproaches, and oftentimes when her husband's anxious gaze rested upon her, she smiled and cast her arms about him. She saw that, 'mid his still impassioned love, day by day a deeper sadness mingled. She would not add to his anxiety by showing all her own.

And where is Tresham, the object of this haunting care; the sinner with a conscience dead in trespasses and sins? He lingers yet abroad. Why, can only be surmised. Lord Brailsford's life is saved, therefore 'tis not the fear of what may come at Otteley keeps him absent, as he at first averred. The initiated, Daubigny's sporting friends, whispered 'tis lack of money makes him scarce; that he is in difficulties; that, were he to return, now that the old year's gone a new year dawns, long-standing debts unpaid, he might receive too warm a welcome; that half-a-dozen lawyers' clerks would dog his steps until they had discovered his retreat, and made his personal acquaintance.

Alas! the hapless Daubigny is wrong, all wrong in every circumstance of his young life. The girl he married, lone, neglected, has left her nuptial home, has gone again to dwell beneath her uncle's roof, and wroth, as rumour says, is he, the guardian and the man of business. Were there nothing else to stir his anger, Daubigny's reckless waste of wealth were all too much.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

D'ABRIDGECOURT had been led to believe that on the 26th of April the Lady Georgina would become his wife. He was greatly surprised then, when all of a sudden the young lady informed him that she did not intend to be married in April. His handsome features became clouded over with an expression of gloom and disappointment. In fact, Willie looked absolutely sulky.

"Surely," cries Georgie, her eyes resting as she spoke on her lover's almost angry countenance, "surely a few days can make no difference to you?"

"To me a single hour makes a difference," answers the matter-of-fact D'Abridgecourt. "Why did you tell me the 26th of April?"

"Because I thought it would do," says Georgie.

"And why does it not?"

"I shall not explain," answers the girl, her eyes cast down to avoid her companion's searching gaze. "Think if you like it's my caprice, but I cannot and will not be married till May."

"May!" repeats D'Abridgecourt in an offended tone; "and when May comes, I shall be put off till the end

of May, and when we reach the end of May it will be June."

"No, indeed," murmurs Georgie; "I promise the very beginning of May."

"What do you call the very beginning?"

"The first week, some time in the first week."

"I differ with you; I say the first *day*."

"You dreadfully exact and exacting creature," cries Georgie, "was ever any one married on May-day?"

"I will be the first then. By heaven, Georgie, I will not have this evasion; yes, I see at the last moment you repent."

"Oh! pray don't get on the stilts. However, that's the style on May-day, all sorts of mummary goes on in this country place. I daresay you will choose to walk up the church on stilts."

"How can you thus idly jest, Georgie, on a subject to me as of life or death?"

Georgie retorted only by a laugh, but her laughter had a bad effect; her lover started to his feet. He was, she saw, getting some crazy doubt into his head. He was, on account of his own inferior position, very apt to take offence. "There," cries she, "you need not be in a pet; sit down again, and I'll consent to be your May queen. D'ye hear, Willie?"

Willie stood gazing out at window. He would not resume the seat he had quitted.

"Then you don't want me after all on May-day?"

"How am I to believe you? How am I to put any faith in your promise? To-morrow I shall hear something different."

"No, I will sacrifice myself to your humour. Everybody will laugh at a wedding on May-day."

"No one will laugh at *me*," says Willie, his great dark eyes looking very like those of a war-horse going to battle.

"*I* shall; I shall laugh all my wedding day," cries Georgie, laughing again, and putting her arms around her war-horse. The young girl's caress reassured the poor and proud D'Abridgecourt. Returning it, he whispers we know not what, but it must have been something rather audacious—audacious at least for those usually guarded lips to utter, and in blushing and surprise Georgie disengaged herself and ran away.

Left alone, the young soldier sighs heavily. The weight of his own perverse fortune often pressed heavily on his soul.

And so, as though by accident, the wedding was to take place on May-day. When old Marston, the Earl's favourite and most trusted servant, heard that the marriage had been put off till May-day, he shook his head and looked grave. May was an unlucky month to marry in, he said, and the auld dames in the village said so too.

It had been deemed absolutely necessary by the Earl and Countess that D'Abridgecourt, at the commencement of his engagement, should communicate the news of his intended marriage to the old Marquis.

Willie reluctantly enough had done so at the outset by writing, but now, as the day draws nearer, Lucy insists that her future son-in-law shall see his noble

and wealthy relative, and pay him the compliment of asking his presence at the wedding.

D'Abridgecourt had a great objection to paying this visit. He was afraid that the man who had treated him invariably with such absolute neglect, who had seemed to ignore his very existence, might suppose that he came now to beg for something wherewith to maintain his position. He had never yet seen his selfish and sensual old cousin, whose character, in one respect, bore a remarkable resemblance to that of the notorious Earl of March, afterwards Duke of Queensberry. The Marquis's love for the beautiful and the fascinating in the female sex very nearly equalled that by his biographers ascribed to his grace of Queensberry, "whose bed, when he lay a-dying" at the age of eighty-six, "was still covered with billets and letters from females of every rank."

But to return to our story. The stern and resolute and proud young D'Abridgecourt, after many battles with his own strong will, at length conquers it sufficiently to obey the Countess's reiterated commands, and presented himself at Rokesley House, the London residence of the Marquis, determined, however, to be as lofty and as distant as he expected to find its noble owner.

Entering his Lordship's presence with such a feeling, how surprised was D'Abridgecourt, after having been duly introduced to, and duly recognised by this stranger cousin, to find him not only affable in manner, but absolutely familiar and kind! He listened apparently with the deepest interest to the account he asked for

from Willie's lips of the Lady Georgina. He inquired after Lord Brailsford. He was quite up in the matter of the duel.

"And how came you," cries the old Lord, laughing, "pardon my curiosity," he added, bowing, "but how came you, my young kinsman, to have the boldness, I had almost said the rashness, the temerity to address the Lady Georgina, to ask her hand at your age, and in your present circumstances?"

D'Abridgecourt colouring, and with downcast eyes, spoke of the long intimacy that had existed between Georgina and himself.

"And this you considered sufficient ground? My good fellow, you must have had a tolerable opinion of yourself," cries the old fellow, his eyes directed full upon Willie.

Afraid of having such vanity, such presumption attributed to him, D'Abridgecourt answered with some hesitation, "I scarcely think, indeed I may say that certainly I should not have proposed when I did, but it happened that I was thrown off my guard by a peculiar circumstance."

"I am an inquisitive old fellow," cries the Marquis, "and I should like to be enlightened as to the nature of this circumstance, this 'peculiar circumstance' that so helped on your suit. Is it possible," continues he, studying the manly grace, the perfect features of his young kinsman as he spoke, "is it possible that the young lady gave some hint, some token?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed D'Abridgecourt with vexation in his manner, his voice; "Georgina is a

girl of quite a contrary nature. Had she cared for me ever so much, she would have hidden it if I had never spoken, as hastily I did."

"Come," continued the old Marquis, touched by the evident simplicity, the manly beauty of his one-day-to-be successor, "come, you will lose nothing by giving me your confidence."

"I trust, my Lord," said Willie proudly, "I trust you do not think that I sought this interview from interested motives. I came entirely at the request of, by the direction of Lady Bedingfield, Georgina's mother."

"Well, I feel extremely flattered by the remembrance of Lady Bedingfield; though I have never had the honour of an introduction, I have often, at the opera, in crowded assemblies, admired her truly feminine loveliness. But, D'Abridgecourt, I cannot let you off. I will not be defrauded of this 'peculiar circumstance.' I am much interested, so out with it. If it be a secret, 'twill soon sleep with me in the dust." As the old Lord spoke these last words, there was a sadness, a deep melancholy in his voice, and when he added, after a moment's pause, "At seventy the grave, the grave is perhaps a refuge, a haven. D'Abridgecourt, I desire to hear that which I have asked you to tell."

Thus pressed—thus, as it were, compelled—Willie, not without a lover's hesitation, told how in pure innocence the Lady Georgina had personated Phryne. How he, unconscious that she sinned in ignorance, had been enraged. How he had been further goaded and distressed by the remarks of the men around him. How, completely off his guard, he had first reproached

the girl, and finally declared his till that moment hidden passion.

Never was such a success as D'Abridgecourt's unsophisticated narrative. The "peculiar circumstance" thus explained was the very circumstance to interest his infatuated companion.

Nothing in the world could have recommended Georgie so forcibly to the notice, the favour of this second Lord March as her personification of Phryne. There was something to his perverted mind so alluring in the fact that the innocent girl had performed the part before a large assembly of the most unblushing courtesan the world ever saw. There was something in it so piquant, so novel. Had the Lady Georgina performed a most heroic deed, had she been a very saint in holiness, in virtue, she had created no interest in that sensual bosom. But this "peculiar circumstance" was so piquant, so amusing, it raised a vision of beauty, of levity, of wit; and ere Willie departed, his Lordship signified his intention of accepting, if possible, if his health permitted, Lady Bedingfield's invitation to the wedding.

CHAPTER LXXV.

'TIS the 1st of May, such a 1st of May as used to dawn upon us formerly. The birds rejoice, the bees have ventured out and hover over the spring flowers that open gladly to the morning sun. Georgie has kept her word. She is to be the May queen. Her war-horse grew so restive under his first disappointment, she dare not put him off even till to-morrow. It is not to be an imposing spectacle. The number invited to attend is small. Lord Bedingfield and Willie detest wedding shows. Georgie thinks only of the rapture of marrying, for she is utterly, positively in love, and the bridegroom-elect, though grave as an owl, yet carries a heart beneath his flowered white satin waistcoat that throbs and flutters from excess of feeling. He looks paler than usual, he looks anxious, he looks very much as though he thought some one or something would defraud him even yet of the first taste of joy that ever threatened him in his whole life. The Lady Georgina, on the contrary, looks more blooming and less timorous than brides generally care to look. There is no affectation of regret, no intention of tears.

Sir Mounteney Skeffington is to perform the marriage ceremony. His daughter Eleanor is one of the bride's-

maids. Sir Mounteney looks pomposity itself, his daughter Eleanor all aristocratic grace. Georgie insists that Stephen shall be present. He can walk better now. With the aid of a venerable gold-headed cane he can make a tolerable limping walk for a short distance. Lord Brailsford had begged to be excused, he did not like going to the church, but Georgie said she would not be refused. Lord Bedingfield, on whose arm the girl leans, has pitiably increased even since Christmas. He has, unfortunately, a greater capacity for fattening than his own oxen. What a contrast are the father and the daughter! Georgie, so sprightly, with a figure slim, symmetrical, and pliant, yet just enough developed to show that she is very woman, her features regular, classic, her dark eyes very striking; and D'Abridgecourt, have we not said before that he is the personification of a noble-looking, well-bred man?

These and many others are already gathered together in the church, when the Marquis of Rokesley, whom they had despaired of seeing, as he arrives so late, when he appears many eyes are turned towards this noble notoriety, as slowly, noiselessly his Lordship steals up the aisle.

The Marquis has a hooked nose like a bird's beak, an eye restless and piercing as that of a falcon, a fine forehead; a grace, an air of distinction, an elegance of manner cleaves to him even in this his very old age.

So the ceremony proceeds, at length 'tis over, and as it concludes, the noble old sinner, the last to arrive, is the first amid the company who ventures to address the bride. With a manner at once flattering and

insinuating, in a voice soft and musical, he begs the girl to lift her veil. He is really charmed by the fair vision that greets him as she complies, and tenderly he presses her ungloved hand in token of approbation.

On returning to the Abbey, the bride seeks her chamber to snatch a few moments' repose. D'Abridgecourt is amid the group of men assembled in the drawing-room below. His nature is not light and volatile, and now suppressed feeling, reserve, renders him peculiarly grave, silent, absent, so absent that on the old Marquis touching him on the arm he gives an evident start. The old man whispers, "Be so good as to show me to some room where are writing materials." Willie obeys. They are presently together alone in the secluded library. The younger man places a chair before a table, sets the inkstand conveniently, then turns his back, looks out at window, while, as he considers, at this most inopportune time the writing goes on. The old Lord, however, presently rises from the chair which Willie had placed. The writing occupied but a short time.

"We will now return," says he, addressing D'Abridgecourt, "we will now return to the rest of the company."

The wedding-breakfast was indeed waiting. The butler had already announced it as ready. The Lady Georgina had descended from her chamber, rather astonished, perhaps, at finding no Willie, but still more astonished, when entering the drawing-room together, she sees her husband of an hour and his noble kinsman. Yes, the latter instantly approaches and offers *his* arm

to take *her* in to breakfast. The girl fain had had the bridegroom's arm, but in her father's house she feels bound to be courteous to the venerable stranger. As slowly, with almost faltering steps, this ghost of himself walks beside her, he says, presenting as he speaks a small leather case, "This is a little wedding-gift, which, however, I must beg you will not open until you are seated in the carriage with my young kinsman."

"You are very kind, my Lord," returns the girl. "Of whatever nature your gift may be I shall highly appreciate it."

"Regard it, my dear, as a mere stepping-stone to better things. It is indeed a solace to me that D'Abridgecourt has shown so much taste. I confess that it would have pained me had the future Marchioness of Rokesley been below mediocrity, nay, had she been but passably fair. When I asked you, my child, to lift your veil, I can scarcely explain how I felt. I almost trembled. But the sweet vision that met my gaze reassured me instantly. I saw all that could be desired in woman; not only regularity of feature, but an expression, a delicacy that satisfied perfectly my perhaps too fastidious taste. My child, let me hope we shall be friends, the best of friends, during my short sojourn here on earth."

They had now reached the table, and Georgina expected and hoped that the old Lord would give place to Willie, that Willie would be allowed to sit next her. But no, the Marquis's ancient figure must still intervene.

The repast goes on much as repasts usually do, and D'Abridgecourt waits impatiently for the happy moment when it will be over. To his disgust and dismay, however, by way of prolonging it, presently arises on his legs Sir Mounteney. The reverend baronet is fond of making a speech, and he makes one now as pompous as it is gracious, which seems to require an acknowledgment from the bridegroom.

Willie is not a speechifier; he has no gift that way, and he hates Sir Mounteney; and turning in this his dilemma to his aged and noble kinsman, he says: "My Lord, you are a man of known eloquence; I am utterly at a loss—I shall be certain to break down; will you be so generous? Will you speak a few words for me? I shall listen—I shall profit; I shall indeed be most grateful."

Perhaps no request could so have flattered the vanity of the old man as this; and it seemed, at that moment, that all the elegance of manner, the grace which in his earlier days had distinguished the Marquis, was once more vouchsafed to him. He rises, he speaks admirably, and to the annoyance of Sir Mounteney and to the surprise of every one else present, he commences his speech by stating that he speaks on behalf of his valued and worthy young kinsman, on behalf of his fortunate and happy successor—fortunate and happy in having this day secured so great a prize, and then he showered such compliments on the bride as made Georgie blush. When his short speech is ended, like a flickering light that blazes up high for a while but to grow dimmer and fainter after, the noble orator, feeble and weak, sits

down, sinks back in his chair. His trembling hand, scarce able to raise to his withered lips the liqueur glass, he bids his own attendant fill with *eau de vie*, so far gone is this man, once a miracle of strength and activity. The Marquis is thus temporarily reposing, his fainting faculties slowly recovering under the influence of the stimulant he has swallowed, Willie is silently or mentally congratulating himself on having escaped the exhibition of a speech, when a sound of merry voices outside the house attracts the notice of several of the company.

The state drawing-room in which the wedding breakfast is taking place is lighted on one side by three vast windows, reaching nearly from its lofty ceiling to its oaken floor. These windows look directly on to the lawn whence the merry sounds proceed. The Reverend Sir Mounteney sits exactly facing one of these windows. Suddenly he gives a start; he addresses Lord Bedingfield in a tone of voice that shows he is offended: "Is this your answer, my Lord," says he, "is this your answer to my letter of expostulation?"

"The most sen-si-ble and prac-ti-cal answer I can give, Sir Moun-te-ney," answers the Earl in his slow and indistinct manner of speaking. "You wrote me a week ago that So-lo-mon grows dan-ger-ous—that he should have his liberty cur-tailed. I car-ried your letter to my chief herdsman. I in-quired of him what could be the ori-gin of the slan-der-ous reports raised in det-ri-ment to the poor animal."

"I am exceedingly indebted to your Lordship," says Sir Mounteney with a very unclerical expression on his

aristocratically moulded features ; “ you refer the case to an uneducated peasant.”

“ I felt certain,” continued Lord Bedingfield, “ that there could be no foun-da-tion for such a charge. The fault, Sir Mounteney, lies all on the other side. When little vag-a-bond boys choose to take un-warrant-able li-ber-ties with Taurus, flaunt their red cho-kers at him, or their red rags of pocket-hand-ker-chiefs, no wonder if he be restive. Their de-lu-ded mothers, I suspect, have pro-test-ed to you against So-lo-mon, d— their in-so-lence.”

“ I am not a whit shaken in my belief,” says Sir Mounteney. “ I once more affirm that the animal has become dangerous, and should not be allowed the whole range of the park, through which, my Lord, as you well know, from time immemorial has been a right of way, a footpath, the disuse of which must occasion serious inconvenience.”

“ My answer, Sir Mounteney, is, look at the picture before you ; can any ev-i-dence be better calcu-lated to silence the mal-i-cious tongues of these old good-ies ? There,” cries his Lordship, advancing from his seat to the window, which he throws open, “ there, do you see my herdsman’s daughter, little Amy Dewberry, do you see she leans her rosy cheek upon the poor animal’s neck ? I repeat, the picture before you is my answer.”

The picture, we should perhaps call it the *tableau vivant*, to which Lord Bedingfield draws Sir Mounteney’s attention, is singular, is fantastic, is blithe, is full of rustic grace.

The village school-girls, all dressed alike in white and

azure blue, with wreaths of lilac blossoms round their new straw hats, have come to serenade the Lady Georgina, to hail her queen of the May. It is a pretty old song they sing, and they do it very well. The children walk in pairs, each couple united by carrying between them a festooned garland of wild spring flowers. In the very centre of the joyous throng walks the mighty and majestic Solomon, his neck also garlanded and ribboned too. The chief herdsman, in a livery of green, such as the Earl's keepers wear on gala days, the chief herdsman leads by a leather thong the noble-looking animal, while Amy, the herdsman's pretty daughter, caresses the snow-white beast as he walks, and feeds him from time to time with dainties from a green rush basket slung on her arm.

Sir Mounteney's temper is irritated, his feelings are outraged, as he gazes on the rustic spectacle before him. As a man of sublime pedigree, as rector of the parish, he feels that he is entitled to exercise a superlative degree of authority over every soul in that parish. And here is a low-born herdsman, one of his own flock too, taught by Lord Bedingfield to be insolent, to be disrespectful.

Almost suffocated by wounded pride, by anger, carefully, painfully suppressed, he once more addresses the Earl. The tone of his voice he intends shall be solemn, but his heart is so full of indignation that, despite all effort, he cannot modulate it.

"My Lord," says he, "my sacred character gives me a right to expostulate. You are making a perfect idol of that animal. I once more affirm that the beast has

become capricious and spiteful, and that it is not to be trusted. The very hand that feeds it to-day may to-morrow be mangled by its fury."

Lord Bedingfield only smiled in the folds of his voluminous neckcloth at Sir Mounteney's harangue. Breathing hard from even the trifling exertion of moving, talking, and throwing open the window, his Lordship returns quietly to his seat.

The Marquis had been a mute spectator of the scene ; nature had endued him with a keen sense for the ridiculous, and, mentally, he had been as much amused at the pomposity of Sir Mounteney as at the obesity and indistinct utterance of the agricultural Earl.

Lucy thinks the present one an opportune moment for the ladies to retire. Looking as though she might have been the bride herself, she signals to the Lady Laura Skeffington, and thereupon the whole bevy of petticoats arise and depart.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

Soon after the ladies have left the room, the Marquis, who sits next Willie, intimates to him, almost in a whisper, that he intends now to steal away quietly, as his health does not permit of continuous exertion. Hereupon his young kinsman inquires if he can be of any service.

"The fact is," replies the noble shadow, still in the same undertone, "the fact is, I ordered my carriage at this hour, and my servant has already apprised me that it waits. I shall like, if you please, that you see me to it; but get up from your chair noiselessly, and let no one suspect I am off. I hope," continues he, "I hope I have performed satisfactorily the errand that brought me hither. I hope that I have given you and the lovely Phryne"—and his old eyes look wicked as he speaks this revered name—"I hope that I have given you and the lovely Phryne assurance of my best, my warmest regard."

The carriage, with its four post-horses, is waiting at the hall door. Willie stands and looks on, while the privileged attendant of the old Lord helps to attire him in a cloak lined with sables. Another minute or two, and rapidly the vehicle whirls away. Willie returns to his seat in the dining-room, very sick of it, longing for

the moment when, without seeming spooney, he may make some advance towards the privileges attaching to his new position.

Ah ! how beautiful are his grave grey eyes in their sudden expression of gladness and excitement, yet how almost abashed his young countenance when presently the Countess herself just peeps in at the door and says, "Willie, I want you, please."

Very soon after this, perhaps half-an-hour after, it is rumoured that the bride and the bridegroom are about to depart. The whole household assembles in the great hall to witness the sweet, sad end, and the wedding-guests, though unbidden, would fain witness the leave-taking too.

The bride descends from her chamber, dressed so simply, yet so becomingly, in a travelling suit of silver grey, her grey straw bonnet wreathed around the crown with velvet of rose and crimson intertwined. Willie, who waits at the bottom of the oaken staircase to claim his prize, Willie, calling up all the *sang froid* he can muster under an inspection so distasteful to him, is still as a sentinel on duty and as erect. The girl, on the contrary, is all ease and grace and smiles, her classic features radiant with unfeigned happiness. 'Tis the moment now for Lucy to give her daughter a last embrace, and, strange to tell, the gay, the flighty Lucy can scarce repress her tears. Her own wedding day in all its bitterness, and the moment when she had embraced her own mother at parting, returns so forcibly upon her.

Well, they are gone ! The equipage that bears them away is whirling rapidly onwards. But lo ! some who

are still gazing after it behold that suddenly the carriage stops—comes to a dead stand.

“What can be the matter?” cry several young voices. Every one takes up the cry; there is abundance of laughter and speculation. But it turns out that a very trifling incident has caused the delay. The Lady Georgina’s maid is presently visible, running towards the house. Her Lady, she says as she enters the hall door, has sent her back for a red morocco jewel-case, which inadvertently she had left on the toilet-table.

Now, let us hear the dialogue going on inside the carriage before the maid was sent back.

“Willie, you must stop the carriage; I have forgotten something.”

“Nonsense,” cries he; “what can you have forgotten?”

“A little jewel-case.”

“You think a thousand times more of such rubbish than you do of me, Georgie. You have scarcely spoken to me to-day. Pray leave it to its fate.”

“I will not. I have not had an opportunity before of telling you about it. Stop the carriage instantly, I say. Do you hear me, Willie, I insist.”

Looking almost sulky, Willie obeys.

“Are we going to quarrel on our wedding-day?” asks the girl, laughing as she observes his discontented look. “It is a gift of your old relation’s, and he desired me not to open it till I was with you in the carriage. I had to keep it about me all breakfast-time, and I laid it down on the toilet-table when I changed my dress, and in the hurry I quite forgot it.”

"Psha!" exclaims Willie, "is that all? I wished the old ghost a hundred miles off, thrusting himself between us as he did."

"But we can make up for lost time now," cries Georgie, laughing.

"Phryne, what does that mean, eh?" asks the young lover, seizing one of the girl's hands and gazing intently on her laughing, blushing face.

"It means nothing," cries she, "except that you are to hush up all your doubts and fears. But indeed I will not have you call me Phryne."

"That old ghost calls you so."

"He!" exclaims the girl in alarm. "How came he ever to hear of it? Some gossiping wretch must have told him of it out of malice."

"I unfortunately was the gossiping wretch," answers Willie gravely, "and I shall always repent my inadvertent candour."

"How ever came you to tell him? How could you tell it to the man I desire should hold me in honour, in esteem?"

On this D'Abridgecourt related to the girl, for the first time, every word, as far as he could remember, that had passed between the Marquis and himself when he called upon him by Lucy's command. They are still on the same subject when the tight-laced maid, gasping for breath, returns with the red morocco case and delivers it to her mistress.

Assisted by Willie's servant, the maid once more ascends the dickey, he laughing at her for the speed she had made.

"Why, Lily," says he, "you run so well, I'll see if I

can get you entered 'mong the young fillies to run at our next races."

"Hold your saucy tongue," says Lily, crimson as a rose with her recent exertion; "I've made myself so intolerable hot, and my hair's a-tumbling."

"What does it matter, my dear? You look best *en négligée*, as the French call it, and if we wasn't perched up so mighty 'igh for all the little birds in the hair to see us, I'd tumble it a little more."

Such is the discourse outside the carriage. Let us hear what is going on within.

The Lady Georgina has opened the red morocco case. She finds it contains a magnificent necklace of a single row of pearls, a sweet little ruby and pearl locket to be worn with it at pleasure. She is admiring the costly and lovely gift when her eye rests on a paper with writing on it, pressed into the white satin-lined lid of the case. She takes it out, opens it. "Why," cries she, "what is it? Yes, it is a cheque. Willie, this must be for you."

He holds out his hand, he takes the paper, he reads. "No, Georgie," says he, "it is for you."

"For me? Impossible. What are the figures? I do not understand oughts. Is it a thousand?"

"Ten thousand," says D'Abridgecourt, gazing on it gravely, almost sadly.

"Good heavens!" cries Georgie. "Oh, but I know what it means; it is a delicate way of paying off his debt to you. Papa says he ought to have done a great deal for you."

D'Abridgecourt shakes his head and laughs derisively. "I might have starved or blown out my brains," cries

he, "and he had never cared. 'Tis his nature, his character : miserly to man, munificent to woman. I wish to God, Georgie, that your mother had never ordered me to go after the old tottering ghost. He intends to ingratiate himself with you, my little wife, and—I may go to the devil."

"Oh, Willie, why are you always so suspicious, so jealous? What harm can there be in such a wreck of a man?"

"There will be harm in him to the hour of his death," cries Willie, sinking back in the carriage with a sigh, his long-shaped and beautiful eyes expressing bitterness and disgust. "We had been happier, we had been better with the little we have than with his patronage and all that he may choose to bestow."

"He said," cries Georgie thoughtlessly, "that I was to regard this little wedding-gift as a mere stepping-stone to better things."

"What *are* his better things?" says Willie, "I should like to know."

"He spoke, too," continues the girl, "of his own short sojourn now on earth."

"I should not care if he lived twenty years more," cries Willie, gazing on the girl with looks of impassioned tenderness, "if he would only leave us to ourselves."

"And will you cloud to-day, the day that we have both so longed for, will you cloud our very wedding day by vain imaginations of the future?"

"I never thought," answers D'Abridgecourt sadly and gravely, "I never thought, after I heard of all the fuss there was to be with people and presents, and bride's-maids and lockets, and Sir Mounteney to perform, that

my wedding day could be agreeable, and, as far as I am concerned, the day has been unpleasant enough."

"You are very amiable," cries Georgie.

"I am not amiable at all."

"This is marriage," continues the girl. "I wish Sir Mounteney had not chained us together."

"So far it has not been marriage—a mere farce, mummary," cries Willie. "Perhaps when we are absolutely rid of our four horses and our white favours, when we have fairly reached our destination, when we have got over the dinner, when the sun has set and the moon is up—"

"Horrid time," cries the girl affectedly, "when the white owl hoots and the black bat flits. I shall be sulky then."

"No you won't," says the young soldier, gazing upon his Phryne in some alarm, but with a grave, impassioned tenderness that enhanced his manly beauty.

"And till then," asks Georgie pertly, "are we to quarrel till the moon rises?"

"I wish, Georgina, you would not talk nonsense. Why do you?"

"Because it makes you look angry, and when you are angry you always look handsomer than at any other time. Willie" (looking at him), "don't you know you're a very handsome fellow? Don't you think so yourself, now?"

"I never think about my looks at all," answers Willie; "I have always had too much mortification, too much to vex me, and if, Georgie, you fancied me merely because you thought me good-looking, I really don't value your love a rush."

"Oh! there was another reason why I married you," cries the girl, laughing provokingly; "perhaps that will satisfy you better. I liked the idea of becoming a Marchioness."

"What a pity you had not fallen in with the old ghost a month or two earlier," exclaims D'Abridgecourt in a tone of badinage that was contradicted by his heightened colour; "you might perhaps even now to-day have been setting off with him for your honeymoon instead of with me."

"Oh, Willie!" cries the girl playfully, "I could not have done without you. In such a case as you suppose, if he had reigned, I should have had you as viceroy."

"You may choose to sacrifice me, Georgie, even yet. Such things have been; old as he is, he is equal to any amount of mischief."

"Now, Willie, this is too bad," cries the girl, casting off her bonnet and resting her pretty head on the proud and aching bosom of the young soldier; "I've quite done with my nonsense now. Why are you so dreadfully upright? Pray subside, there's a dear. Forget now it's our wedding day, at least forget all the exhibition, as you call it; not, however, that I see you have any right to complain. I had only six bride's-maids, you know, and only fifty people, including ourselves, sat down to breakfast. What would you have thought of Miss Belle Brabazon's wedding? The only time I ever acted a part in a wedding was then. I was one of her twelve bride's-maids, and four hundred people came by invitation, and another hundred, I heard, had invitations which they did not accept."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

It is the second morning after the Lady Georgina's wedding. The several guests who have been staying at the Abbey have all departed, and Lucy goes down to breakfast with a sense of loneliness, with an aching heart. She scarce knows why, but a peculiar sadness seems to weigh upon her spirit, seems to cleave to her, and, when the letters are brought in, she starts, a thrill of deeper pain succeeds the dull one that causelessly had oppressed her before, for she sees, addressed to herself, a letter in the handwriting of Desmond de St. Brie. She opens her letter with a hand that is tremulous as the beating of her heart. And what does she read? That, in spite of every human aid, in spite of the voyage to, the residence at Madeira, death had claimed the consumptive cousin, and Desmond succeeds to his estates. He lays the offering at her feet, but he will not urge her to accept it. He dare not urge her to take a step so grave, which her own conscience disapproves. "Yet, Lucy," continued he, "my own soul, my too impassioned heart rebels. I cannot bring myself into subjection. Oh, what a destiny is mine! God saw me defrauded of all that I held dearest, and I may not beseech Him to give me my lost treasure back."

Canst thou, my reader, imagine the fond, frail woman's distress? She must answer the letter. She must once more pierce the still faithful heart that in girlhood she had well-nigh broken. She must continue to live on with a husband who daily becomes more akin to his own fed beasts.

Stephen, with his limping gait and his ghostly face, enters the breakfast-room. He finds on the table some letters addressed to himself, and, while examining them, his attention is diverted from the Countess. She sits with Desmond's open letter in her lap, her eyes are cast down, are fixed on those beloved characters.

She dare not hold the letter up, lest her Lord, on coming in from his customary tour of inspection, should recognise the writing.

Suddenly Stephen starts up and limps to the window. "Mamma," he says, "I am afraid something is the matter. My father's horse has come to the door without him."

Lucy was so bewildered, so lost in her letter, she had scarcely heard at first what Stephen said, but now, now she comprehends. She sees him ring the bell; she hears him give orders for people instantly to go in search of Lord Bedingfield. He inquires if any one knows which way their master had ridden.

And presently Lord Brailsford goes forth himself, and Lucy is left alone.

In spite of every effort to repress it, sin in her heart is whispering hope. She looks up to heaven, she mentally beseeches God to pardon her sin, to give her strength to resist, to crush it out. But as one quarter of an hour passes and the Earl comes not,—as the

chiming clock in the room tells her that another quarter has passed, and no tidings even arrive, her agitation and her sinful hope, despite all effort at self-control, deepen, and she stands shuddering and pale as death.

Two quarters more in silvery tones that old French clock must tell, and then shall Lucy hear a sound, slow and measured, a trampling of feet. No hum of voices, no single word falls on her listening ear, and the deep and voiceless silence seems to bode, to waft the fatal news.

Lord Bedingfield, on a hastily improvised and rustic bier, a wattled hurdle for his couch, a rolled horse-cloth for his pillow, is borne home by six of his farm-labourers. That life is extinct seems but too certain, but a messenger had been despatched for Dr. Softly, who arrives at the Abbey door simultaneously with the Earl's rigid and ghastly form.

At his command the six bearers place their sad burden on an old oaken table that stands in the midst of the hall, and there, after making a minute examination, the doctor pronounces that he can give not the slightest hope. The Earl may probably have been dead an hour before he had been found.

Lucy, still in the breakfast-room, but unable longer to support herself, has sunk down on to a chair. Her plump little hands, with palms usually rosy bright, look bloodless now, and are locked fast, almost convulsively together. Icy cold she is in this moment of dread suspense. She shudders, but she sheds no tear.

Stephen and the doctor come and gently tell her.

She gazes on them with an expression of horror, of doubt. "No, no," she murmurs, "it cannot be!"

Ah, how little know they of the sinful conflict in her heart! How little know they that in its very depths there is an irrepressible desire to hear repeated again, again, assurance of the fatal truth!

The doctor, with his power of appreciating the depth of human emotion, eyes the Countess with some degree of alarm. Those tearless eyes, those blanched lips, the hands, deathlike, locked convulsively together, give token of overpowering feeling.

"You must endeavour, Madam," says he in his blandest tone, "to reconcile yourself to your cruel, your irremediable loss. You must console yourself in the assurance that I am able to give—that death must have been almost instantaneous; no suffering. And who, Madam, had so little to dread in a translation so sudden?"

The Countess listens. Can she dare to believe? Her overcharged heart almost refuses.

"Mamma, dearest mamma," says Stephen, kissing his mother's pale cheek, "I would not, I could not believe at first, but it is indeed too true," and overcome by bodily weakness, by mental suffering, by memories of Lord Bedingfield's harshness and neglect, the young Earl himself breaks forth into a passion of tears. The doctor now brings wine, and bids the Countess swallow it. He gently unclasps one icy hand from the other, and rubs hartshorn on their palms.

Gradually Lucy recovers from the too great shock. With her head resting on Stephen's shoulder, the pent-

up tears steal forth. But no voice can whisper comfort to her soul. He is dead, and conscience wakens. Despite herself Lucy must mourn, not for his death, but for her own ingratitude, her own duplicity.

Stephen is still doing his best to comfort his mother, is still sitting with one attenuated arm around her. Dr. Softly, though still present, has, with his usual delicacy of feeling, withdrawn a little distance from the twain, when a servant, entering the room, announces, "Sir Mounteney Skeffington." The rector, yet resentful of the rebuff he had received during the wedding breakfast, holds his head rather higher than usual. He shows neither surprise nor regret. "The wonder is," says he, addressing Lady Bedingfield, "the wonder is that this unfortunate affair has not occurred long before. Every one in their right senses might have foreseen that it would inevitably happen."

Just at this cruel moment Sir Mounteney's visit is anything but welcome. In a very short time, however, Lucy and the young Earl are temporarily relieved of his presence.

Beckoning the doctor to follow, he quits the apartment.

Sir Mounteney likes to interfere with, likes to be paramount in every matter connected with his parish, and he has called thus early at the Abbey to inquire of the doctor whether of necessity there must be a coroner's inquest.

After due consultation it is agreed that, since no person witnessed Lord Bedingfield's death, a coroner's inquest cannot be avoided.

And when Stephen and the Countess are left alone

together, while her tears are falling fast, she says, "Stephen, will you write to Georgie?"

"Must we blast her happiness so soon?" murmurs the ghostly young Earl. "Will not to-morrow be time enough?"

"No," says Lucy, "she would never forgive us—to-day."

"Mamma," continues he, "you would do it best."

"I cannot," answers Lucy with a shudder, "my head is too confused; my mind—"

Ah! Lucy shrank from such a task. She knew how Georgie had loved her father, and she could not dare herself to write such words of tenderness, of passionate regret as became a suddenly bereaved wife and mother. She felt that God knew her every feeling, and she dare not lie thus before Him.

"I will do my best," says Stephen; "but it is a terrible thing to have to snatch so soon from Georgie her scarce tasted happiness, and D'Abridgecourt will feel it deeply too," continued he; "though so different, they always got on so well together," and Stephen's tears started anew as he remembered that Willie had ever been preferred to himself.

It was indeed too true Lord Bedingfield had loved the noble-looking yet hard, unpolished, unworldly orphan boy who always came to spend his holidays at Otteley, far better than the ailing, the refined, the fastidious, the spiritually-minded son born to be his successor.

But we return to the present. The consultation over, Sir Mounteney departs, and the doctor returns

to the room he had so lately quitted. As he approaches the Countess, he is struck by her exceeding paleness and by a restlessness of the eyes; the hands, too, are again tightly clasped together. With his most persuasive gentleness he begs her to try and be composed, and asks if he may venture to prescribe a little sedative draught. "If your Ladyship will not deem me too officious," says the courtly doctor, bowing, "I should suggest that you take the mixture and retire to your bedroom, that the curtains be drawn, that you lie on the bed. It is quite possible that you may drop asleep."

On this Lucy fell a-weeping bitterly. She thought of her poor dead Lord, and how impossible it would be for her ever again to inhabit the connubial chamber, that chamber which she used laughingly to tell him was redolent of boots and buckskins. Oh! for her 'twould be for evermore a haunted spot. No, she must again occupy the Frenchified apartment, the gewgaw bed the poor little Earl had so detested.

The Countess rings, and when the footman answers the bell, she bids him send Celine. Celine is the only person in the household who feels no regret. She knew that Lord Bedingfield had disliked her, and now she receives Lucy's orders to carry all her things into the French room with scarce disguised satisfaction.

Fortunately the gewgaw bed had been occupied by one of Georgie's bride's-maids so lately that it required no airing, and in less than an hour from when she had been first summoned Celine returns to her Lady, and assures her that the room *couleur de rose* is in perfect readiness.

Carrying in her hand the sedative mixture, which our doctor had been able to prepare from the family medicine-chest, armed with this Lethe, Lucy at once retires. To rest? To court oblivion? O no! The still lovely Countess locks her door; and now that no human eye beholds her, she may weep those impassioned tears that alone can bring to her burdened heart relief. She casts herself indeed upon the bed, beneath the hovering Cupid, and there, like a thunder-shower on a summer day, her burning tears gush forth. The bitter past, the frightful present, a future which as yet she may not welcome. But oh, what a heaven is in that future! Without shame in this world, without perdition in the next, to love and be beloved by Desmond de St. Brie! The very thought brings momentarily a bright blush to Lucy's pale cheek.

O woman, to the outer world, to the uninitiated, how inconsistent dost thou oftentimes appear! Thine actions how frequently belie thy words! Yet could we read thine inmost soul, how much that seems contradictory and whimsical would prove to be the reverse! Have we not but just now heard Lucy aver to her son that she could not write to Georgie, that her mind was too bewildered, her head she would have said *distracted*?

And presently the mother who could not write to her daughter arises from the bed whereon she has been weeping to write to Desmond de St. Brie!

Yet there is in fact nothing inconsistent in Lucy's conduct.

The Lady Georgina had not the slightest suspicion that the lover of her mother's girlhood still retained

his early passion, and would have scarce believed it possible that the Countess, under the mask of levity she usually wore, could be capable of deep, intense, and enduring attachment.

Lucy then can write to one who comprehends, who has been a fellow-sufferer in her heart's long trial. But she can find no fitting words wherewith to mask reality.

And how childlike and unstudied is the letter that Lucy writes ! She first tells of her agitation, her heart-stricken feeling as at the breakfast-table she had read the letter of temptation, but how instantly she had determined to resist. She next tells of the miracle that had freed her from her vowed allegiance to another, and then Lucy finally gives herself sweetly and trustingly to him who had hoped against hope, who had borne isolation and sorrow for her sake in humble resignation of spirit. "Thou art worthier, my own beloved Desmond, far worthier than I," wrote she. "May God help me to become all that thou wouldst approve ! Life to me has been but as an idle jest. I have had no interest in going right."

There was a padlocked box in the Abbey hall with a slit in it. Any one of the household who chose might drop a letter into this post-box, and then it was certain at the right time to go safe to the post-office. For many, many years, when the family was down at Otteley, it had been old Marston's custom to unlock the box, take out the letters, and transfer them to the post-boy's leathern bag.

Lucy knows by long experience the time when Marston will unlock the box. With her own hand will

she slip her letter in previously. She does not desire that any one should know that on this dreadful day she writes to Desmond ; and further, she does not wish to be seen gliding down the oaken staircase across the hall to the box.

Ah ! see the Countess, as stealthily she opens her door, looks up and down the corridor, and listens if there be a sound. Her mind has been so troubled that all her silky chestnut hair is unfastened, and now she is so troubled she heeds it not. In this hour of anguish and excitement she is not the gracefully fur-belowed woman of fashion, she is a woman *distract*.

Nature, sorrow, and amazement chase art and worldly thoughts away. So Lucy, in her tumbled white muslin dress, its frills, its pale blue ribbons decomposed, her hair dishevelled, glides along the corridor, flies lightly down the stairs, crosses the hall, slips her letter into the post-box.

As she regains her bedroom, she congratulates herself on her own skill, her own accomplished artifice. But her movements have been so rapid, that now she is once more alone in her apartment. For the first few minutes one hand is pressed to her throbbing temple, while with the other she clutches a chair-back for support.

What a whirlwind is in her mind ! But her agitation had been of a deeper, a more cruel kind ; and a crimson blush of shame had dyed her cheek had she known that one, far more practised in craft than herself, had been inadvertently a witness of what she deemed her adroit performance.

The softly-gliding doctor, useful in how many different ways at Otteley, on this deplorable day has, with old Marston as a prompter, been gently reminding Stephen that he must give authority to some one to order mourning habiliments for all the male servants in the establishment.

Stephen, as much bewildered by his suddenly acquired and little coveted burden of wealth and responsibility, as is his mother by her unlooked-for freedom from matrimonial bondage,—when the two men enter his room, and the doctor explains their object in intruding, begs, without so much as raising his head from the paper on which he is writing, begs “they will do and order whatsoever Marston thinks right.”

On receiving this unlimited authority, Marston, with all due respect, requests the doctor to come with him into that curious little nook known as the office, and which, as we have before remarked, opens into the hall. Here the late Lord’s most valued and trusted servant knows he shall find pens, ink, and paper. It was rather late to begin such a letter,—a letter that required extreme clearness of language, plainness of direction, lest the London tailor to whom it was addressed might not perfectly comprehend the extensive order. But with the ready pen and ready wit of the doctor, and the experience of the poor trembling old valet, the letter is accomplished just before the time Marston unlocks the post-box.

Our courtly doctor’s task over, he rises from his chair by the table, he walks to the office door. The door, when the two men entered, had been left ajar.

The doctor is just about to push it open wider, when through the narrow aperture his catlike eyes are crossed by a vision, which for the moment arrests his hand.

He sees the Countess, her hair dishevelled, her dress *à l'abandon*, he sees her drop a letter into the letter-box, then with all the lightness of step, the rapidity of girlhood, fly across the hall, ascend the staircase.

Dr. Softly had in him as much of self-command as of craft. He neither moved nor spoke, so that old Marston, who was in the background, obtained no glimpse of the fair apparition.

"I will know what the Countess is about," muses the doctor. "It can only be a case of extreme urgency. Agitated and ill, as I have seen her this morning, nothing short of dire necessity could induce her to move so rapidly."

Accordingly the doctor loiters in the hall until Marston, having unpadlocked the letter-box, is about to transfer, to consign its contents to the darkness and concealment of the leathern bag. Whereupon our wily friend exclaims, "Wait one moment, Marston, one moment. There has been such deplorable confusion to-day, my head is wellnigh turned. I really cannot remember whether I put a letter in I intended to. Just let me see."

The old valet, perfectly unsuspecting, places the few letters the box had contained in array on a neighbouring slab of marble.

"Thank you, thank you," cries the crafty and inquisitive Esculapius. After due inspection, adds,

"Thank you, it is all right. I am quite satisfied." And satisfied indeed the doctor is that the Countess has written to-day, in the first hours of her freedom, of her widowhood, to Desmond de St. Brie.

During Stephen's illness our lynx-eyed friend more than once had suspected a tenderness. Unseen, he had studied the priest's pale, *spirituel* countenance.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THERE must needs be a coroner's inquest. And there is one, and various servants of the Otteley establishment appear as witnesses. First old Marston, now, through the dreadful shock and the loss of the kindest master man ever had, looking ghostly as the occasion itself. He relates that as usual, at seven o'clock on the morning in question, he assisted his master to dress, that he has since called to mind that he did observe an unusual difficulty in his Lordship's breathing ; but he could say nothing more, for he had gone down-stairs to ascertain, according to his daily custom, whether the groom was waiting at the hall door with Lord Bedingfield's horse. There was a part of the stone-work at the entrance of the Abbey that rose up considerably higher than the gravel sweep below, and from this elevated stone his Lordship was enabled to mount his horse without difficulty. At this early hour his Lordship always rode unattended. But he remembered that on this morning the groom who had brought the horse to the door, stood talking with himself for some minutes after their master had got on to his horse, and they saw their master ride in the direction of the model farm. The

said groom called, confirmed what Marston had just narrated concerning the latter part of the old valet's statement.

Others, other witnesses were called. But they could only tell that after searching about the model farm in vain, they at length went into the park. There in the distance they saw Solomon, and they could also distinguish something dark near him lying on the ground. They made up to the animal, and to their horror and consternation found the dark object on the ground was the body of their master. At first they thought that the bull must have killed him. But Solomon, though restless and excited walking backwards and forwards, showed no violence, and on raising his Lordship up and examining him, no mark or injury could be discovered.

The chief herdsman was present. He gave testimony as to the gentleness of Solomon when not provoked. The man was proceeding in his statement, when the rector, looking indignation itself, was down upon him. "Provoked! was it provocation for people merely to pass near the animal?" Several instances had been related to him of the animal's ferocity. His opinion would never alter. The bull had been the immediate cause of the Earl's death. Why was the horse, when he came back without his rider, trembling? Why was his neck steaming with sweat? Sir Moun-teney well remembered once having heard his unfortunate friend say that the bull was jealous of this his Lordship's favourite horse. Undoubtedly the animal had attacked the horse, and the excitement or the

fall from the horse, accruing from the bull's ferocity, had caused death.

Do what he would, however, Sir Mounteney could not succeed in his object. He had attended the inquest determined to have his own view of the case adopted, but he cannot criminate the bull sufficiently. Dr. Softly is determined that the Earl fell from his horse in a fit, that he died a natural death from apoplexy or epilepsy. On this Sir Mounteney, with dignity in his mien, ill-concealed rage on his aristocratic countenance, takes leave to protest, and insists on having his protest recorded "before this meeting, this inquiry is over."

And while the coroner's inquest is going on, the Lady Georgina is travelling back over that same road she had but so lately traversed in unwonted flippancy and liveliness. The young couple had gone on the day of their marriage to Faulkbourne, the residence of our poor little Earl when he had been nothing more than Mr. John Everard Leigh. Faulkbourne, scarcely twenty miles distant from Otteley, was beautifully situated, the house not large but picturesque,—picturesque in the highest degree; and its mature age, its shadowy yew-walks, had led Georgie to speak as she went along of the white owl hooting, of the black bat flitting, for there, in unmolested peace, the one and the other existed. This comfortable residence, with the 200 acres surrounding it, and £5000 in money, Lord Bedingfield had settled on his daughter before her marriage. It was the only land unentailed he pos-

sessed, or you may be quite sure Georgie had come off better. The Earl had also determined to allow his daughter £1000 a year, and he had stated that although Faulkbourne might be called her future home, he himself should consider Otteley his daughter's proper home, as there she must always abide when military duty made it imperative for D'Abridgecourt to be absent. He could not spare his Georgie, and he thought it a pity Willie should leave the army.

Thus matters had been arranged. A good deal to D'Abridgecourt's annoyance, he did not like the idea of leaving his wife at Otteley, and here was one of his wedding-day grievances.

And now the tables are turned, as Georgie, with her tear-bedewed handkerchief at her eyes and real grief in her heart, draws near to Otteley, the home that had been, and was to have been so entirely at her disposal, where *she* was everything and Stephen nothing; the Abbey which now is her brother's, and in the future is it likely she will condescend to use it?

From time to time as they journey on, D'Abridgecourt gazes on his weeping wife. He scarce dare attempt to speak. How can he offer consolation? He knows that Georgie and her father have been united by real tenderness, and he knows, besides, that much of the young girl's worldly comfort has been suddenly dashed away—reft from her. How thankful is the grave and somewhat stern young soldier then, when they are within a few miles of Otteley, how thankful is he to hear his Georgie say, and her tears gush faster as she says it, "Willie, I shiver all over; put your arm round

me, come close to me. Oh, Willie! I seem to have nothing to cling to now but you, and I am afraid I shall be almost a burden to you."

"Oh, Georgie," murmurs her lover, "if indeed you would condescend to be wholly mine, I should almost be wicked enough to rejoice in this dreadful accident. I could not bear the idea of leaving you at Otteley."

"I would have done anything to satisfy *him*, poor dear," cries the girl, weeping anew; "and if it gave him any comfort, I am thankful I did not contradict him. But indeed, Willie, I did not consider much about the future; so long as we married, that was the great point."

"What if it had happened but a few days earlier? Then we should have had to wait; and when once a thing is put off, God only knows what may come," says D'Abridecourt.

"Well," answers the girl, "you are sure enough of me as it is, and I repeat what I just now said: I fear I may prove but a burden, a trouble. Poor dear papa has been so mad about farming and breeding, and he was so ridiculously munificent to his work-people, I quite believe, Willie, I shall prove to you an incumbrance."

"To feel that you were all my own were everything. But, ah! my poor Georgie, perhaps existence to you on such terms were grievous."

"I am afraid I should not understand, brought up as I have been. You know mamma is so careless about money; she never takes heed of expense."

Willie sighs deeply. His little flush of hope is over.

He has had to economise, he has had to practise self-denial all his young life. But Georgie would not be able to understand. Ah, yes, he can comprehend that the little wife will be a sufferer every way by her father's death.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

WE must now return to our Helene, from whom we shall scarcely stray again.

'Tis over; the event predicted by Dr. Softly to happen in May, that which the girl had regarded with so much depression of spirit, has unfolded its mystery. After a long and lingering suspense, extending over many more hours than was natural or proper, after the doctor had experienced considerable alarm, the girl has become a mother. And now is grief and fear added to her previous suffering when in voices of triumphant gladness the women tell her she has a fine boy.

We presently find Sir Charles approaching the poor pale ghost of our earlier Helene. Leaning over the wan waxlike figure of the little wife as she lies still and deathlike in the great nuptial bed, he whispers sadly, "My love, I know that I may not congratulate you."

The girl slightly moves her head in token that he is right, her lips tremble.

"My dear child," continues our master, his voice betraying an agitation he fain had hidden, "my dear child, everything shall be done that can be done to

lighten the blow. I purpose sending off St. Amour in an hour's time with my letter to his last address. Even if he has left Calais, St. Amour will be able to find him."

"What have you thought of saying?" feebly ask the girl's quivering lips.

"That I regard him as a son, that I must ever do so, and that I shall provide for him accordingly."

"An elder son?" murmurs the girl.

"My love, in one respect that cannot be."

"I know," answers she, "but as regards money?"

"Yes, yes, and I will not fail to add that if possible his present and pressing necessities shall be attended to."

"Stoop down and kiss me," murmurs our poor Helene; "the doctor bade me not sit up."

How fondly, how tenderly, how almost reverentially our master avails himself of the girl's permission, and that kiss is supplemented by a sigh, a sigh of penitence, of contrition. Ah! she read the heart that strove to, yet could not, hide its anguish.

"Do not be afraid," she whispers, "I shall not die. The doctor says I am all right now."

Sir Charles did not answer, but his dark eyes told of a love, of a passion too deep for words, while the consciousness that he might have spared her, and had not spared, gave to his ever *spirituel* countenance an expression indescribable, an expression Helene fully comprehended. He had wrought all this evil. Yet as she gazed, as she sighed, she loved her Saint, her fallen Saint, still.

Recollecting himself, recalling the duty he has to

perform, Sir Charles tells her "he must not linger. We shall be easier, we shall be better content," murmurs he, "when our messenger is on his way."

'Tis past midnight. In that large, low-ceiled chamber dedicated in his boyhood wholly to the use of Tresham Daubigny, wanders now the shade, the wreck of its former master. His presence at Brierly is unsuspected by Sir Charles. It is indeed a secret intrusted by young Daubigny only to St. Amour. The chamber is but dimly lighted. There are no signs of recent occupation. On the contrary, it has a forlorn, a forsaken look. Yes, that chamber that in years gone by had rung with a boy's frolicsome mirth, which in later years had been scattered over with evidences of luxury, of waste, of sport, of sin, where oftentimes had been carolled forth the snatch of a too amorous song, where many an oath had resounded 'mid the chat and the chaff of less happy and less fortunate companions, that chamber to-night is an utter desolation. Silent it is save for the weary footfall of our prodigal, as with unequal strides he paces to and fro. This silence is, however, broken presently. St. Amour enters by the door which purposely had been left ajar.

"Capitaine," murmurs the valet, "if you must see mi Ladie, 'tis now you go; she sleep."

"How do you know?" asks Daubigny, pausing in his troubled walk and questioning St. Amour as much by his eyes as by his voice.

"Mais, oui, certainement. Hannah pass from de room. She tell me she is glad to say mi Ladi sleep

at last. I let de maid go her way et puis moi, myself, I steal in. By mi Ladi's breathing I could tell she sleep. That cunning docteur give her something make her sleep. Then, Capitaine, I steal to de door of de ante-chamber. Dere de nurse sleep too in great chair. Child, de curst leetle one, sleep in her arms, de leetle silver boat and de food stand by."

"Why do you tell me of the child?" asks Daubigny somewhat impatiently. "I care not for the child. 'Tis herself once more I would behold." He is going, he reaches the door, he turns back. "Suppose any one should be in the corridor ; suppose some one meet me?"

"No one will be dere, de docteur go home. Before he go he bids every one be still. No foot dare venture."

"Then," murmurs Tresham, "I will try my fortune," and he disappears. Strong as nature had formed him, he feels his heart fluttering ; he feels an oppression almost approaching to faintness as he steals along the well-known corridor, and on reaching the door of the girl's apartment he is compelled to pause a moment to try and recover a greater degree of composure.

Helene sleeps under the influence of opium administered by our doctor, hence her slumber is heavier, deeper than if nature or mere weariness had prompted it.

Tresham puts out a hand that is not over steady, and gently lifts the heavy damask curtain of the nuptial bed, and then his eyes take their last view of the only being he had ever really loved, and for whose sake he had often fancied he could have renounced his dissolute habits and curtailed his extravagance. He gazes on her long, and as he gazes sigh after sigh breaks from

his sinful and his stricken soul. Sorrow, overwhelming sorrow is his portion. He would have cursed her if he could for this last indignity her marriage had brought upon him. But love yet holds him in its thrall. He cannot choose but love her to the end.

Even in this her sickness, as she lies so near akin to the image of death, for him she is fraught with angelic loveliness. Her cheek has lost its childlike roundness, it has wholly lost its roseate hue. But the tawny lashes tipped with jet rest on its waxlike paleness, and the pencilled brow above is perfect, and the lips, though paler, still are those sweet parted, pouting lips he always longed to kiss and might not. He covets, he desires her; yet he would not have her live when he himself must die.

"Let me hope," muses the ever selfish sinner, "let me hope that we shall die by the same blow. Let me hope that the news of my death may be her own. Women in her state, women in childbed, I have heard, I have read, are like to die of a too sudden shock."

At this moment, as thus Daubigny muses, the girl stirs, moves restlessly in her sleep. She throws one arm up, and the loose frilled sleeve of her night-dress falls back and leaves bare her arm,—that arm that Tresham had been wont to think, if it had a fault, was too sunny in its hue, too round, too childlike in its form. How changed he sees that once gipsy-like arm! Ah! now its creamy, sunny hue is gone; 'tis almost thin, and the little hand is white, is wasted too.

Instinctively he knows that anxiety, wasting sorrow for himself, has wrought this change. But the girl is

restless. She may waken. She may utter some wild cry. He dare not linger. He kisses the arm she has flung up, and he is gone.

With noiseless steps Daubigny returns along the corridor to the low-ceiled chamber called his own. All hardened as he is, to-night he cannot enter it without some sense of additional pain. He has reached the ante-chamber attached to that chamber; at present he lingers here, he goes no further.

We have once before mentioned that in this ante-chamber is a boot-rack; there is also in it a gun-rack.

Tresham had always been a creature of extremes. His soul, his body seemed composed of two opposing natures. His toilet-table, in his happier, earlier days, displayed all the refinement of a high-bred or a modish woman's; his ante-chamber or his dressing-room, ever distinguished by weapons, by implements that would seem to mock at the scent-bottle, the ring-stand, the jewel-case.

Daubigny has reached the ante-chamber. At present he goes no further. He pauses before the gun-rack; he takes down a once favourite gun. As he is carefully, critically examining the gun, St. Amour, ever on the alert, glides in. Daubigny starts as the valet speaks, for he knew not of his presence.

"Pardon," says the man, "they will not bring de worth of feefty pound sold en precipitation. Wait, Capitaine, attendez."

"Did I say I meant to sell them?" asks the young master, a strange smile playing on his lips as he speaks.

"Ah! I had forgotten. Well, I am not going to sell them." Then, after an instant's silence and irresolution, he adds: "St. Amour, I may as well tell you at once. The governor offers to make a complete settlement of my affairs, and he has also offered Avonmore as a place of retreat while the settlement is in progress. I am, in fact, on my way to Avonmore, there to lie quiet and incog. until the settlement be effected. I have trusted you often, St. Amour, and found you a safe man, or to-night I would not trust you with my place of rustication. By God, if they got scent of it, a hundred avaricious and voracious sharks would be down upon me, thinking first come first served."

The valet, gazing on his fellow-sinner, bows his head respectfully in token of assent.

"I shall want a gun then, this gun. The governor gave it me once as a birthday present. It's a good gun, it's brought down lots of birds," and Tresham points it as though he were aiming now at a bird. "Has Broadhurst cleaned them lately?" he asks.

"La semaine passée, Capitaine," answers the valet.

"Well, where's the case belonging to this gun? it must be unscrewed and put into the case."

"De case in my room."

"Will you see about it? There should be a flask too; there was one."

"De flask I put away; its poudre not safe about."

"Well, you must find it ready. And did you go to the people at the 'Crown' and bid them have a chaise and horses waiting at the cross roads?"

"Oui, certainement, it will be dere."

"I shall have to walk from here to the cross roads ; can you carry the gun-case ?"

St. Amour bowing, answers that he shall be too happy.

Then Tresham bids the man leave him, as he has to look for "some papers that are somewhere," and he has also to write a letter.

And now that he is alone, Daubigny enters the deserted-looking chamber within. As he gazes round, an intense misery almost masters his usual levity ; but, making an effort to be cool and philosophic, he feels in his waistcoat pocket for a small key. He has found the key, and, with it in his hand, he walks up to an old-fashioned *escritoire* of our great-grandfather's days, puts the key into the lock, unlocks it. The front of this old *escritoire* is made to come down ; 'tis lined with crimson cloth, and thus is formed a desk to write on. In one of the *escritoire's* drawers he knows there are some particular papers that he would not leave behind him. He proceeds to ransack the drawers, but before he can do this he must needs remove a pile of letters that at one time or other he had thrust in here out of his sight. He takes them up, he becomes conscious that some of them are letters, unopened letters, addressed to himself from his sister's governess, from the unfortunate girl whom he had ruined, and who, but for his uncle's compassion and generosity, might have perished of weakness and want.

The colour rises to his brow as he casts them down, for though no tender memory of the governess assails

him, though he feels no pity for her, a tide of painful recollection, in which she mingles, rises to haunt him. He leans his elbows on the crimson desk of the escritoire, and cannot proceed rapidly to work as he had intended. Not long, not long, however, does he suffer such weakness to hold him. He searches further, he finds the papers he seeks. They are transferred to his coat pocket. And now, now one last, sad, cruel act remains to do, and all will be over with him then in life.

He is about to write to Helene. He intends to write in such a manner that she may believe his death to be wholly attributable to herself. He will waken her tenderness, he will recall their early love, he would stab her to the heart. He hopes that the words he writes may blast her as the lightning sometimes blasts. Such is the vengeance he would take upon the man who wooed and won the girl by stealth ; such is the only boon he craves, that she too may perish.

Wild and impassioned were the words, the last words the sinner's hand e'er set on paper ; such words as only a heart seared, steeped in wickedness, could breathe or think.

But we must confess there was something deeply moving in the finish of the letter. He was on his way to Avonmore. There, 'mid those sheltering rocks where once he had embraced her, there, 'mid the rocks, the water flags by the river's side, there would he die.

" Bid them," he wrote, " bid them make my grave *there—there* where I shall fall. I ask no holier ground, no funeral rite. The murmuring stream shall moan me as it flows, nor cease its pitying murmur ever."

Even in the hardest natures there is a shrinking when death draws very near, and Tresham's soul shuddered now, and his hand seemed averse to giving the letter signifying his own death. He delays giving the letter until the last minute.

St. Amour and he set out from Brierly at sunrise that lovely summer morning. They walked together through a long winding country lane, till they reached the cross roads. There, where a white sign-post marks the spot to-day, just as it did then, pointing its arms in four several directions—there, drawn up beside the rugged patch of green whereon the sign-post stands, they see the chaise and pair, the post-boy out of his saddle waiting for the early traveller.

And now comes the worst. Daubigny must give the letter. And when once it has passed from his own hands into the keeping of another, there is no drawing back. Death, only death will be present to his mind.

Pausing in the green lane where the wild hawthorn hedge beside and above them is alive with joyous birds, carolling forth their matin song, pausing so far off from where the hired carriage is stationed that the boy cannot overhear their discourse, Tresham lays a hand on the valet's shoulder, a hand that, despite of rowing, boxing, dragging at reins, is still small, white, symmetrical.

"My good fellow," says he, "you have been faithful to me hitherto. There is something yet I must get you to do."

St. Amour raises his eyes to his companion's countenance. He is rather struck by its paleness. There

is, too, a sort of smile on the lips that is in contrast to the expression of the eyes; it seems to him to be an affected smile. He listens—

“This letter,” continues Daubigny, holding the letter in his own hand, “this letter I have written to *her*. You must give it to her on Monday evening.”

“It is not permit for me to enter mi Ladi’s chamber,” answers the Frenchman; “I can give it to de maid.”

“No,” continues Daubigny, “that will not do. You yourself must place it in her hand or before her.”

The valet nods his head, but seems doubtful whether he shall be able to accomplish the desired errand. The fact is, he has been accustomed to receive a bribe or reward, and Daubigny, in his distress and confusion of mind, has omitted to mention the price he will pay. Now, however, when he sees St. Amour hang back, he recollects himself.

“I have taken one gun,” he says, “I have left two; appropriate the two. Do what you will with them. I give them as a reward for this last, this particular service.”

St. Amour recovers his wonted alacrity. With *mercis* and bows he promises.

“She will not betray you,” continues the young master. “She never has, she never will. You promise me you will give her the letter on Monday evening when my uncle is down-stairs, safe at the dinner-table.”

“I promise, Capitaine, merci, votre tres-obéissant,” murmurs the valet, bowing.

“I shall know that she receives it,” says Tresham, a

lie on his lips to the last. "I have asked her to make a request to my uncle, a particular request. He will write to me granting it or not, as may best suit his fancy."

As he walks towards the chaise Tresham gives the letter. "Put it into your breast-pocket," he says. "Mind that no eye but your own rests upon it, and let no one know that I have been at Brierly. I thank you, St. Amour. Good-bye."

The man bows low, and with apparently the deepest respect. Then he deposits the gun-case in the hired carriage, the door of which the post-boy holds open. In another instant Daubigny places himself on the shabby cushioned seat, the door of the vehicle is slammed to, the post-boy mounts his sorry but obedient jade, and St. Amour and his fellow-sinner shall meet on earth no more.

CHAPTER LXXX.

PERHAPS Graham had never been so elated as now. His peerage case was once more before the House of Lords. The Committee for Privileges had listened to, had already remarked favourably on the revised evidence and its important addenda.

One great lawyer, a member of this erudite Committee, had been heard in private discourse to say, "That the missing link that, on the previous hearing of the case, could not for love or money be found, had, as by a miracle, turned up at length, for nothing."

There had been an adjournment of the proceedings, but there was every reason to believe that next time the Committee sat in consideration of the case, it would pronounce in favour of our claimant, and George would see the ambitious dream of his life realised. He would legally become a Scottish Earl. He had been so intensely interested, watching over his chance, his hope of future nobility, that Helene and Sir Charles had heard from him seldom of late. But now that his affairs were in so fair a train, now that he was proclaimed a grandfather, he had written to his daughter congratulating *her*, and playfully asking for her congratulations in return. The warmth and tenderness with which he wrote of "the cursed leetle life," as St.

Amour called the new-born child, surprised Helene. She had never for a moment imagined that such an event would please her father. It did please him so, however, or the idea of his approaching nobility had so favourable an effect on his temper, that at the end of his letter he proposed, when it might be convenient, to make a flying visit to Brierly.

Though full of anxiety, Sir Charles had answered the letter in the most courteous and cordial manner, asking Graham to name a day in the week following that in which he himself wrote, "when he hoped Helene would be somewhat advanced towards convalescence."

In answer, Graham had fixed a day, or rather an evening, on which to arrive. He would be at Brierly half an hour before the usual dinner-time.

Helene, who was now well enough to sit up in bed and write with a pencil, wrote a few words to her father, suggesting that he came quite an hour earlier than he had named, as she intended to try and be up to receive him, and thought if his visit to her room were so late as after dinner, her strength might not hold out.

The girl has a satisfactory answer, and at length the day of the promised visit arrives.

Poor dear Helene! she has not lately cared how she looks. But now, the day that her George is to see her, she does care. She bids Hannah pull the blinds up, she bids her set a looking-glass before her on the bed. Until now the girl had suffered Hannah to do with her as she would; never since the day of her confinement had she called for a glass. As she gazes now

into the mirror placed before her, she is almost startled at the vision she beholds; she is almost shocked at her own wanness and delicacy. She looks more like a spirit from another world than the formerly voluptuous and almost too rosy Helene Graham. Yet vanity, and Helene always has vanity, vanity tells her that she is not unlovely even in this her sickness; and, to see her father, who is such an intense critic in such matters, she resolves to do her best to escape remark.

Oiseau and Hannah tell her that ladies, after their confinement, always appear at first in a cap. The girl bethinks herself how a cap is to be manufactured; she calls for a little lace *fichu*, with a few pins she pins it presently into a form that will do. A frilled and embroidered white muslin sitting-up gown is to be put over her night-gown, her little feet she insists on having dressed as usual in thin kid shoes, and, despite Oiseau's caution, she must have cobwebby silk stockings. "How can I catch cold," murmurs the little invalid, "when I shall scarcely move, and in this hot room?" And if a young mother should ever read Helene's story, will she not wonder somewhat that the poor little baby's costume and appearance, on its first introduction to its fastidious grandfather, should have no place in Helene's thoughts? Some young mothers think perhaps too much of their baby's adornment. But to Helene's child a history so sad attached as rendered it in her eyes but a painful object. It had come into the world to blast the hopes of, to set a mark of indignity upon the man for whom, despite her every endeavour, she could not feel indifference.

When, very soon after its birth, our doctor had informed her that its very life depended on its drawing nourishment from herself, she had submitted to necessity. At stated times the child was brought to her. When the maternal duty was over, it was carried away into an adjoining room.

Never once had she manifested any interest in this token of her sorrow, never had she asked to see it between-whiles. Sir Charles had been wise indeed in instituting Mrs. Bird as its nurse. The doctor had objected, had spoken of old-fashioned notions, had wanted a nurse of his own finding to preside. But Sir Charles had been unmoved by the doctor's representations. He knew Mrs. Bird. He could trust her entirely. She alone should be the infant's nurse.

Graham, according to his engagement, arrives at Brierly. He is presently introduced to the lying-in chamber. Unconscious of Helene's acquaintance with and attachment to Daubigny, he is wholly unsuspecting of the anxiety that for months has been preying on her mind. He is surprised, nay, almost shocked at the alteration he finds in his daughter, but the girl tells him (blushing as she says it) that her paleness, her thinness, arises from her extreme illness at the time of the birth of her child. George, on hearing this, and taking it for truth, considers that time only is wanting for her restoration to her former self. But he cannot help saying something in his old half-sarcastic, half-playful way, as soon as Sir Charles comes up-stairs, "Why, Charles, what have you been about? Where

are my daughter's peach-like cheeks, her rosebud lips, her gipsy hands? Why, old fellow, you have changed my little girl into a lackadaisical-looking fine lady. She looks as though she had been blanched. I came to see my own opening rosebud, and I find but a pale drooping lily."

"I think," answers our master, "Helene will acquit me of carelessness. Since I became aware that she was likely—likely—to increase my family, no day has passed without the visit of a skilful, an experienced ladies' doctor."

"That's just how the girl has been robbed of her colour and her flesh. For God's sake, Charles, send the doctor to the devil. My dear Helene, whatever he prescribes for the future throw out of the window, throw it on to the lawn, and you'll find the grass will presently look as sickly as yourself."

"Indeed, papa," murmurs Helene, laughing for the first time since her hour or hours of anguish, "indeed, I do not think the doctor has poisoned me. He is very innocent, except of intense curiosity."

"Am I not to see my grandson?" exclaims George. "Do you suppose that *I* have no curiosity?"

"Do you wish to see it?" says Helene, blushing deeply. "Charles, dear, will you tell Mrs. Bird?"

Our poor master! With a sigh he strives to suppress, he opens the door of an adjoining room, bids Mrs. Bird bring the child. With a delighted smile on her face the old nurse obeys, and curtsying to Graham, exhibits the sleeping child which she carries.

For its age it was a fine child, although it had

suffered from the distraction of Helene's mind. Mrs. Bird had not forgotten its adornment though the young mother had. In those days caps for infants were not extinct, and it was habited in a robe and cap of costliest embroidery and lace.

Graham gazed upon the child, and as he gazed the unconscious cause of so much sorrow opened its eyes. They were long-shaped eyes, like our master's; like his, they were also large and dark. Cries George, "You have set a mark upon the boy, Charles. No one could mistake him; he is a thorough Daubigny. His eyes will be exactly like your own."

"Oh, he is all his," answers Helene. "I never wished for a child."

"That is a foolish thing to say, Helene," replies Graham. "And for my part, I welcome the little fellow from my soul. Oiseau," cries he playfully, "you never thought to be carrying my grandson."

"No, sir," says the old dame, curtsying again. "Indeed, sir, I never thought to see the day when my master would have a son of his own for me to nurse."

"And he's shown his wisdom, Oiseau, in giving the boy to you. None of your learned doctorlike nurses for me. The old style's the best."

"You can take the child away now, Mrs. Bird," says Sir Charles.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

GRAHAM departs to dress for dinner, and Sir Charles is alone with the little wife. Our master congratulates the girl on George's spirits, on his looking so well. Faintly Helene smiles. She is thinking how strange it is that he can so entirely have forgotten her dead mother. Sir Charles, perhaps, has the same thought, but they are too painful thoughts for either to venture to utter. The clock, Tresham's chiming clock, tells him he must go. He takes the little wan hand in his own, he says, "My love, just a little morsel of chicken. Will you only try now? Hannah can bring it up on a tray." His dark eyes look so anxious, so tender, so beseeching, the girl has not the heart to refuse. And our master goes off to his bachelor room, thankful that Helene will try to eat some dinner.

Sir Charles had at first thought of dining quite alone with his once hated rival, now his gracious father-in-law; but somehow he could never feel at his ease with him. A certain degree of awkwardness, an unconquerable consciousness *must* stalk between them. And little as he cares for Sir Mounteney, he thinks his presence will be a relief. Yes, Sir Mounteney might

suit George ; they would talk to each other, and he knows in what estimation a title is held by his reverence, and he feels pretty certain Graham will soon let the parson understand that one is coming his way.

So a note is despatched to the reverend baronet. "This makes three," muses our sensitive master. "Softly, poor Softly, might not he be present too ?—a little compliment after all his attention."

Sir Charles always pitied the broken-down, the ailing physician, flung by destiny as in sport, from a splendid London practice to remote village life.

'Tis no difficult matter, my reader, for thine imagination to picture our four men dining together at Brierly this lovely June evening.

George loves late hours. Our master knows that George detests dining early, so dinner had been ordered an hour later than usual.

The weather, though so early in the summer, is oppressively warm,—so warm that a great window at the far end of the dining-room is thrown wide open. Laden with the perfume of jessamine, of roses, of honeysuckle trained round the pillars of the glass-covered verandah, the stilly air comes stealing softly into the stately apartment, mingling when in the room with the fragrance, the odour of sliced cucumber handed round by the attendant servants,—the cucumber an adjunct to a fine salmon-trout or salmon-pink, which had been caught in the river Wye where the Wye bounds the vast domain of Avonmore. In honour of Graham's first visit at Brierly, the sideboard glitters with plate,

and the table too ; and the dinner is *recherché* in the extreme.

'Tis almost the twilight hour of June. The sun gives token even now of its departure. A crimson or a roseate glow suffuses all the western sky, and those who are at table can, through the scarcely moving leaves, discern the rosy glory of approaching eve. They can hear, too, the glad voices of the birds coming from amid the garden shrubs. How sweet, unhurried, how liquid, soft, and clear rises one silvery voice ! 'Tis the black-cup's summer note. And far in distance, from the mighty oaks that stud the park, sing blackbirds, thrushes, in a wilder and more varied strain. 'Tis still daylight out of doors, but the verandah running round the house diminishes the daylight within, and the old butler thinks it high time now to give our diners the benefit of artificial light. He has just ordered Tummas (our old friend Tummas) to set light to the waxen tapers in the tall branch candlesticks on the table. But the window is not closed, and the fading daylight, the sweet-scented air still steals in.

Ah ! how placid, how comfortable a picture of a small dinner in the country is here !

And the discourse between Graham and the parson has already begun to grow interesting. Sir Mounteney is just emerging from a haze of doubt and suspicion, which from the time of Sir Charles's marriage he had cherished. He is fain now to confess to himself that he has laboured under a mistake, that Lady Daubigny's father, instead of being a mere adventurer, as he had believed him to be, is a man of distinguished family

and considerable fortune, while his eyes tell him that never have they rested on a more noble-looking figure of a man.

The parson, too, perceives that Graham is very nearly as consequential as himself, and this sympathetic quality seems to attract them, while it tends somewhat to subdue the aristocratic rector's pious arrogance.

They have other points of resemblance, other congenialities. Their appetites are as *exigeante* as their pride, yet are they both epicures. And now each of the twain has been diving into an *entrée* presented, offered by Jeames,—an *entrée* thoroughly Parisian, which St. Amour some idle day has taught the Brierly cook how to make in perfection.

Let us leave them bestowing their praises on the same and ascend to Helene's room.

The girl is still sitting up. According to the promise Sir Charles had induced her to make, she intends at his dinner-time to try and eat a piece of chicken. She waits; at length Hannah appears bearing the tray. The old maid sets it down on a small table she had placed ready before she went down-stairs. As she sets it down she says in her precise manner, "I trust, Madam, I have brought everything you require."

Helene arising, seats herself before the tray. She takes a tiny bit of chicken, half a spoonful of pease. "Hannah," she says, "you have forgotten the salt."

"Is it possible?" cries the old maid; "why, I placed a silver salt-cellar on the tray with my own hands." She comes to look, but the salt indeed is wanting. "I will go immediately," she says, "and bring it. But

how it could be I cannot think ;” and Hannah runs down-stairs.

St. Amour, who had been on the watch, who had purposely abstracted the salt-cellar from the tray while it waited in the hall below,—St. Amour now, in the maid’s absence, enters the lying-in chamber. He says not a word, he walks stealthily up to the table before which *mi Ladi* sits, and deposits on the damask napkin that covers the tray Tresham’s letter.

He is gone, and the girl, with a thrill of unconquerable feeling running through her veins at the sight of Daubigny’s handwriting, tears open the letter.

What does she read ? Is she in her senses ? Does he mean death,—that he is about to die by his own hand ? Never very clear about time and dates, Helene’s brain grows bewildered. Her only hope is that by showing the letter to her husband, his nephew’s desperate design may be frustrated. By the time Hannah returns bearing the salt, the girl has read the letter in part, has gathered sufficiently its meaning to know that Tresham contemplates suicide. In her confusion of mind it appears to her, however, that even yet his fatal determination may be changed.

“Go,” cries she as Hannah approaches her, “go instantly to your master ; tell him not to waste a second ; tell him to come to me instantly, or it may be too late.”

Helene had risen from her chair ; one hand clutched at the chair-back for support, in the other was the open letter. The girl’s deathlike paleness and the wild glory of her affrighted eyes sufficiently attest to

Hannah the necessity of speed. The woman, of course, could form no notion of what was the matter, but she could tell that something in that open letter there was of frightful import.

For once in her life the formal old maid is led to break through all propriety. She sends no message, she goes into the dining-room herself, she hastily approaches Sir Charles, nay, even ventures to touch his shoulder; then, in trembling accents, whispers her lady's message.

Our poor master's heart, nay, his very soul faints within him as he listens. He rises abruptly from table, he utters no single word, he flies up-stairs.

Not very far had he to go. The poor girl, so fearful of delay, had recovered herself sufficiently to quit her room, cross the landing, reach the top of the first flight of stairs; there, leaning on the banisters he finds her.

"Charles," cries she, holding out the letter, "read it; tell me, is there time to save him?"

Our master takes the letter from her trembling hand, by the light of the globe-lamp at the head of the staircase he reads. Alas! he presently comprehends better than herself. But commanding his agitation to spare her, keeping the fearful misgiving of his soul to himself, he says, "My child, I will despatch some one to Avonmore immediately. Let us hope—"

"Who? who?" cries she.

"Who but St. Amour?"

"He knows not the spot," murmurs she, the most wretched, the bitterest of anguish overwhelming her; "you, O pray go yourself."

"No, my poor love; I dare not leave you. But in this house is one who knows every crevice, every rock at Avonmore."

"Yes, yes," cries she hoarsely; "it matters not now. Tell papa I cannot see him, I am too ill, but that I beg, I beseech him to go." As the poor girl spoke these last sad words, she sank on the oaken stair. "Leave me," she continues; "think nothing of me. If there is hope, it is in despatch."

Happily for Helene, she had suffered inadvertently her husband to keep the letter. Never ready at making out days and hours, her head bewildered, she yet clung to hope.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

IF Sir Charles had longer attempted simulation with Graham, we should not have liked him so well. He felt but too certain from what he had read in the letter that Tresham was bent on self-destruction, then rose to our master's imagination a fearful possibility, the possibility of a lingering death. Yes, Tresham might not have died instantly, he might even yet be alive in that secluded nook among the rocks, incapable of moving, unseen, dying without a human hand to aid him.

He must induce Graham, who knew it so well, to go to the spot. But how would it be possible to induce him, unless he knew that his own daughter was in some measure implicated, and that on her must fall the deepest anguish?

There was but one course to pursue, and Sir Charles, with a brow blushing, burning with agitation, agitation arising from various sources, bids Graham read the letter.

Until that letter was placed before him, young Daubigny's particular intimacy with Helene had never been suspected by her father. What then was the shock he experienced when he found by the allusions made in that letter that he who wrote it had met the girl in

private, that his arm had encircled her childish form, and that she unresistingly had allowed such familiarity, nay, had reciprocated her lover's rapture?

"And you overlooked, you concealed this?" says George, looking up from the letter, gazing on his companion, and almost trembling with anger against his child, with rage against the sinner.

"I would never have betrayed her imprudence," answers our master, "but now to yourself it is perhaps advisable that I do so. It is possible that," and here Sir Charles absolutely shed some tears, "it is possible that on his person may be tokens of his mad attachment. George," he continued, "you love her as I love her. If there be any such evidence, your hand can do what prudence prompts, and *this*," pursues the jealous husband, taking from Graham the fatal communication, "this should perish too."

"I see the necessity you indicate," cries Graham. "I am indeed the fittest person to make a search for the wretched scoundrel, but wherefore should St. Amour accompany me?"

"Ah!" cries Sir Charles, "it is useless endeavouring to keep St. Amour in the dark. I have many reasons for believing that all along he has had the most intimate connection with my hapless nephew. George, 'tis safer to *seem* to trust him. I have no doubt that he could tell far more than I should care to hear."

"By God, Charles," exclaims Graham, "you make my blood run chill! What am I to infer from this mystery? Does it relate to Helene? I told you that passion would be her inheritance."

"Compose yourself," says our master; "there is nothing absolutely wrong; Helene has not erred, save mentally. I am convinced that she has never deceived me. I was perfectly aware of that hour of imprudence he alludes to; aware of it the very evening of the day on which it occurred."

Graham gazes on his old rival, and something like gratitude is born in his soul. Who but he, knowing what he had known, had shielded, had hidden, had forgiven her trespass, and made her his wife?

"George," continues Sir Charles, "I shall consider myself indebted to you to the last moment of my life if you will but hasten to that spot now made doubly, trebly sad to me. Your search will tend to satisfy her as well as myself. But God only knows how she may sustain the shock."

"I go," answers Graham, "but 'tis I who must owe you a debt of gratitude. Charles, I see, I comprehend; you saved her, you snatched her from impending ruin."

"Go, only go," answers our master; "I am expecting the carriage every instant."

On this Graham quits the room, hastens up-stairs. For the time being he lays aside the prestige of his nobility. He leaves the fine valet he had brought down with him at Brierly. He takes his way once more to the banks of the Wye, almost feeling as sad as when he had been the steward at Avonmore.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

No railroads at this time existed in several of the counties through which lay Graham's route to Avonmore, consequently the mournful errand he had undertaken must occupy time. It was not until the fourth day from that of his departure that he reappeared at Brierly.

Helene had scarcely slept during her father's absence. No one had been able to persuade her the first night after she had read the fatal letter even to lie down, but agitation of mind had produced so great a weakness that the power of sitting up had deserted her, and since then, as now, in wakeful, feverish wretchedness, propped up by pillows, she reclines upon the bed. On the announcement of Graham's return to Brierly, Charles Daubigny, with beating heart, with throbbing temples, goes hastily down-stairs to meet him in the hall, to caution him not to shock the poor girl by any sudden and cruel disclosure. But George takes a very different view of the matter from our master.

"I shall see her," he says; "I shall briefly state what has been the result of my search. I shall speak without any regard, any deference, to the feeling my

narration may excite. She shall at least know my feeling in the matter."

Finding it impossible to prevent the interview, our master returns to the poor girl, and, with his accustomed tenderness, says, "My love, your father wishes to come up-stairs and see you."

"Oh, I cannot see him," cries Helene; "I dare not, I cannot. Beg him to tell you."

"My poor child, he will not be denied;" and even as the husband speaks, the father, without waiting, enters the nuptial chamber.

"I have done as you desired, Helene," says George, in a voice that almost savoured of sternness; "my errand is accomplished. On arriving at Avonmore I lost no time, I went straight to the spot he specified, to the spot where you suffered his embrace, where his lips lied to you of love. He was there; he was cold and dead and stiff. He had not given himself a chance of escape; he had literally blown out his miserable brains. And now, hear me and forget it not: had I known as much as I know now some months ago, perhaps a year ago, I could not have restrained myself—I had perhaps spared him the trouble; I had sent him to the perdition he deserves a little earlier."

"For pity's sake be silent," cries Sir Charles, pointing to the hapless girl, who had fallen into a deathlike swoon.

"I have done," says Graham; "I have told her my mind. You, Charles, may pour in what balm you choose,—foster the wound if you will," and Graham speaks with almost a sneer; "but for myself, I shall

show no pity for a sentimental, nay, a sinful passion, a girl's romantic dream. Remember, however, old fellow, I warned you; I felt certain, sooner or later, how it would be."

"Think not of me," murmurs Sir Charles, a burning blush mantling his pale countenance, rising to his very brow.

"I am sorry for you, Charles, nevertheless," continues Graham, eyeing his former rival, a little secret triumph in his soul.

"Do not add mockery to cruelty," cries our master, his dark eyes flashing with anger.

George answers nothing. Believing the girl's faintness to be only an attack such as fine ladies occasionally suffer from, an hysterical affection soon to pass off, he goes down-stairs more angry perhaps than sorry,—angry, resentful of his daughter's past duplicity; and, in a few minutes, he has re-entered the carriage in which he had travelled to Brierly, and is on his way to London.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

IT is a morning in July so lovely, that as the swallows skim joyously around the house and the garden warbler utters its soft, clear note, and the chaffinch and the robin give forth their wild bursts of song, and the bees hum about the ivy blossoms on the roof,—it is a morning so lovely, and all nature seems so softly to rejoice, that a stranger gazing on such a scene on such a morning, would scarcely deem it possible that within doors is one whose ear is insensible to the song of the birds, and whose eye heeds not nature's glad tokens shed around. Never had the garden, the quaint old garden at Wodebourne more teemed with beauty and with sweetness. White lilies, long undisturbed, in untold abundance reared their snowy heads, as old-fashioned heavy roses without number drooped beneath their own freight of beauty. Lavender, of its own deep lilac blue, stands at intervals dividing the parterres as hedges, and groups of mingled, dark-hued, and pink sweet pease scent all the air. And the house, too, how rural, how picturesque it looks! Nothing had been changed in or about it since the death of its mistress. And to-day, on this morning of sunshine and beauty, the boy she

had idolised, the young prodigal who had grieved her so, the broken-down man to whom she had bequeathed this her chosen home and nearly all her fortune, occupies the room wherein, with fluttering heart and eyes that scarce repressed their tears, he had first heard proclaimed her love had served him to the end.

Seldom since that sad funereal day has Graham cared to visit Wodebourne, but he has sought now, for the present, its seclusion. He would have the news, the wonder it excites, of Tresham's suicide blow over, and he waits for other news.

There has been in the *Times* a notice which affects him, or which, a day or two ago, *did* affect him infinitely. The notice ran as follows:—"Committee of Privileges.—The Gartmore Peerage case *will* come before the Committee again on Friday next." George knows that on that day the fate of his peerage case will be decided, and his interest in that fate has been so intense that he would rather withdraw from the world's notice, he would rather retire to Wodebourne until the fate of his suit is declared. He sits this hot summer day, carelessly attired in rustic garb, but as he never wears anything but what has been rendered by a first-rate artist, his russet suit has a style or fashion about it. Ah! how lightly has time touched his beauty,—beauty, that beauty with which nature endowed him remains still. How few can compare with what he is even now! Yet to-day, this sweet summer day, his soul is so bowed down by sorrow that he is ready to cry out, with the man of wisdom, that "all is vanity." There lies the letter before him that can make him

careless even of the decision of the Committee of Privileges. We quote a portion of the letter :—

“She is seldom conscious for long together,” writes our master; “the fever is so great, the pulse so high. However, my dear George, the physician Softly desired to have down, and who saw her yesterday, gives most flattering hopes. You may rest assured that everything that can be done, shall be. If, in a day or two, she does not improve, I myself shall insist on the visit of another London physician of eminence. I need scarcely speak of myself. You must fully comprehend the intense misery I am enduring. She knows me sometimes. Once she called to me to come, once she feebly put her hand in mine. If she should be taken from us! . . .”

THE END.

12

Y

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 042230802